The Extraordinary Life
of
Peter Douglas Blackledge

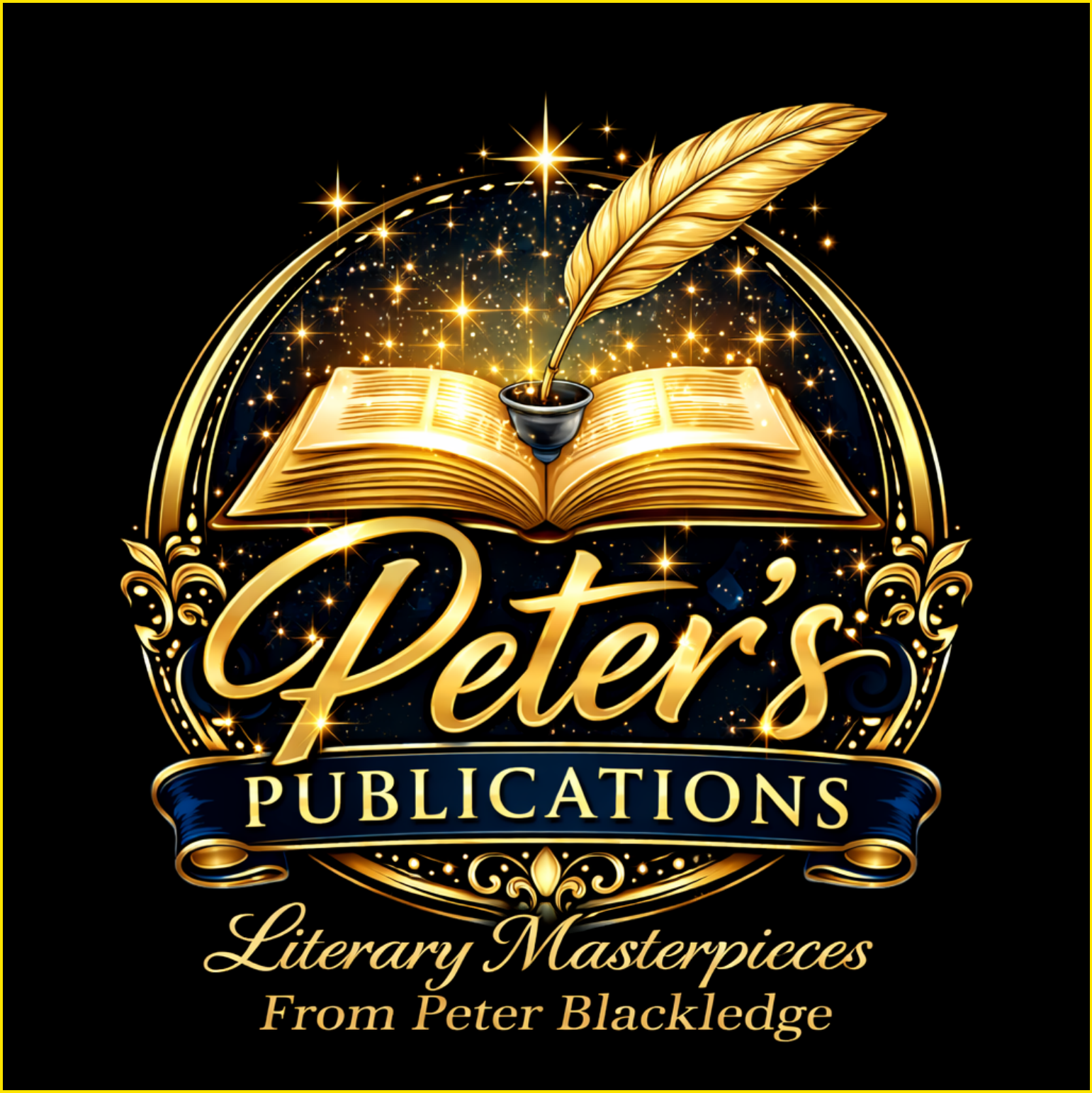
United States Naval Academy
Class of 1969

By Laura Helen Foy

In Collaboration With
Peter Douglas Blackledge

Any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction: "I served in the United States Navy."

President John F. Kennedy
United States Naval Academy
August 1, 1963


Peter's
PUBLICATIONS
Literary Masterpieces
From Peter Blackledge

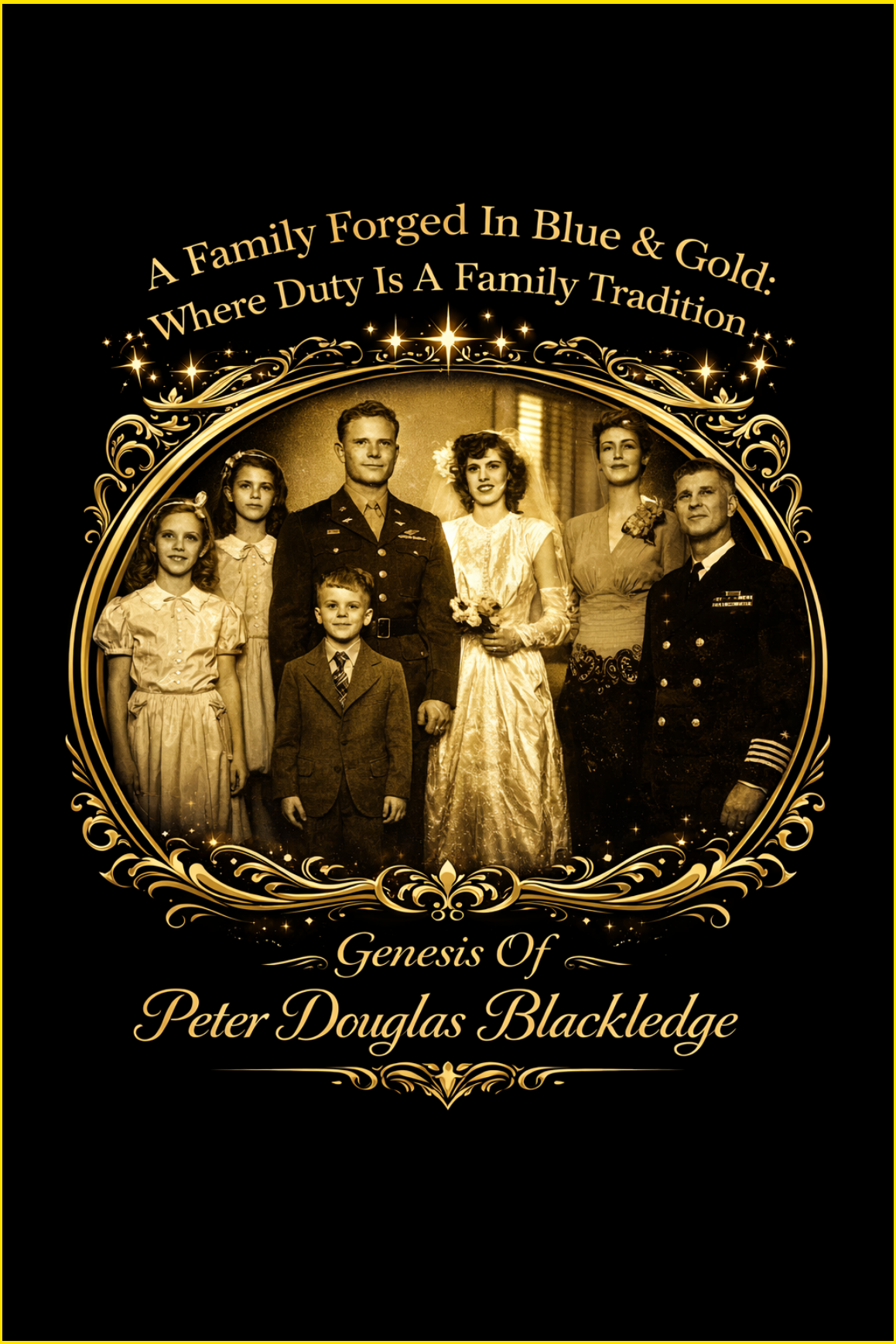
DEDICATION

Honoring The Life Of
My Beloved Life Partner
Peter Douglas Blackledge

By Laura Helen Foy

The light of your goodness and joy
so beautifully illuminated the lives of
all who were privileged to know you.

United States Naval Academy's Dedication
of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE '69"
Navy Crew Racing Shell, October 25, 2019


A Family Forged In Blue & Gold:
Where Duty Is A Family Tradition
Genesis Of
Peter Douglas Blackledge

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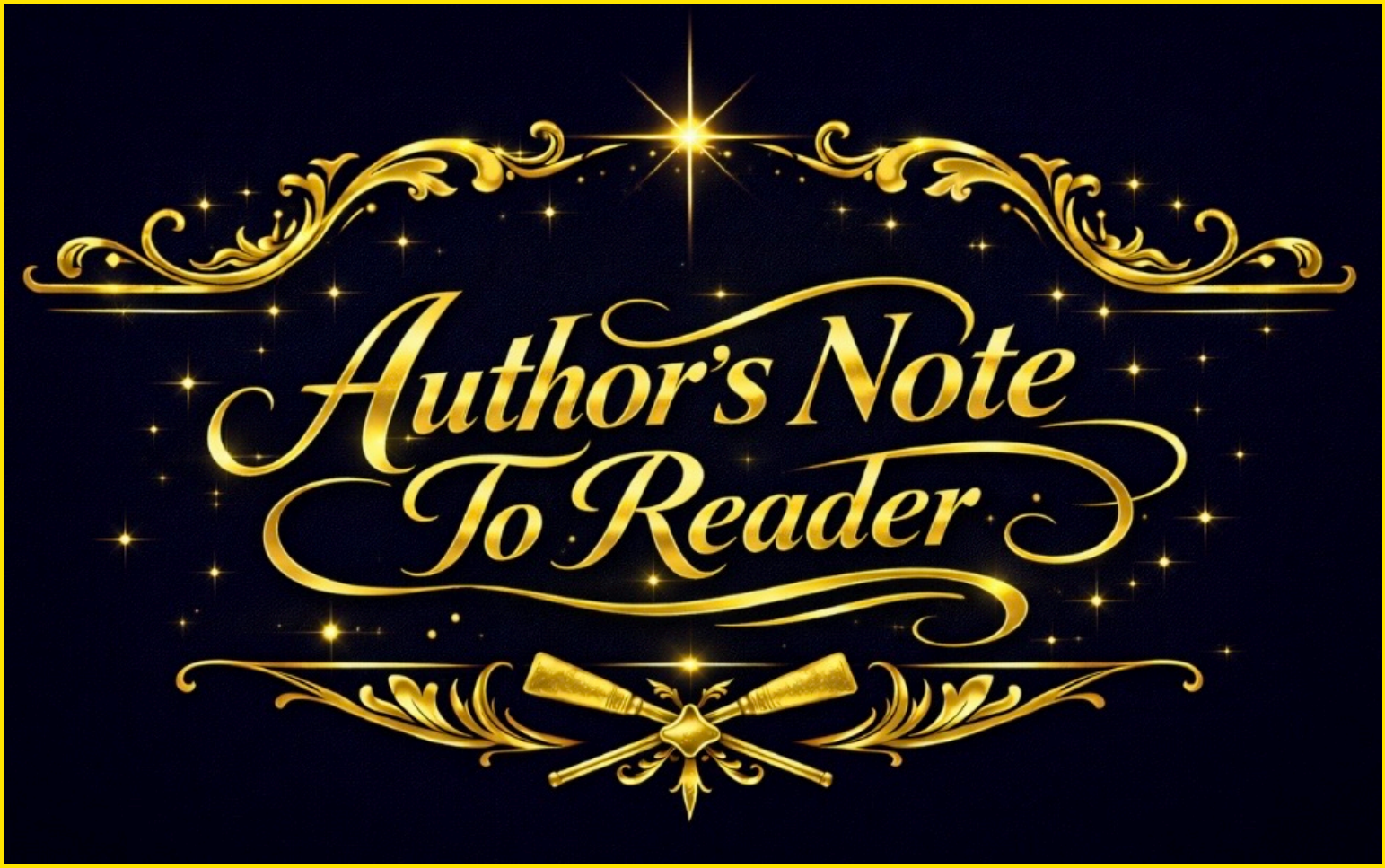

Author's Note
To Reader

Author's Note To Reader

This electronic document is an advance, substantially abridged version of the full memoir "The Extraordinary Life of Peter Douglas Blackledge" - which is scheduled to be published in hardback form in late 2026 or early 2027. This document was developed to provide me with a shortened, early, virtual substitute for the full memoir which I can provide to family, friends, and funeral attendees in the event that Peter passes away before completion and publication of Peter's full memoir. The full, hardback book will contain the following complete 27 chapters:

Chapter One: A Family Forged in Navy Blue and Gold: Where Duty Is a Family Tradition

Chapter Two: Growing Up Texan: Shooting Rattlesnakes & Capturing Wild Armadillos

Chapter Three: Fast Times At Lamar High: Wild Parties, Hot Cars, & Beautiful Girls

Chapter Four: Hard Times At U.S. Naval Academy: The Making Of A Naval Officer

Chapter Five: Ascension To The Revered U.S. Naval Academy Championship Rowing Tradition: Peter Becomes A Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman, And A Rowing National Champion

Chapter Six: Graduating Into Two Wars: Standing America's Watch Against The Soviet Threat As A Cold War Warrior

Chapter Seven: Honoring America's Finest: Guided Missile Cruiser USS ALBANY (CG-10) Band Of Warrior Brothers

Chapter Eight: Through The Looking Glass: Peter's Surreal Transition To Civilian Life

Chapter Nine: Naval Sea System Command Vanguard: From Gas Turbines To Vertical Launching Systems

Chapter Ten: Assistant Secretary Of The Navy Vanguard: From First Director For Naval Warfare To First Director For Aircraft Carriers & Amphibious Ships —- A Decade On The Elite Pentagon "E" Ring

Chapter Eleven: First Among Leaders: "Distinguished Graduate" Of DoD Executive Study Master Of Science Program

Chapter Twelve: Global Vanguard: Leading An Elite Multi-National Task Force On Around-The-World Mission

Chapter Thirteen: SAIC Vice President: Corner Office & Seat At Fortune 500 Table

Chapter Fourteen: Accolades

Chapter Fifteen: Guiding The Next Generation: Peter's Nieces & Nephews

Chapter Sixteen: Recruited By Olympic Gold Medalist & Rowing Hall Of Fame Coach Allen Rosenberg: Becoming An International Rowing Masters Champion

Chapter Seventeen: Called To Lead: Elected Captain Of Championship Volleyball Teams

Chapter Eighteen: The Education Of A Martial Artist: Training Under World Karate Champion Chuck Norris

Chapter Nineteen: Epic Illuminations Of A Remarkable Life: Peter's Novellas

Chapter Twenty: Fascinating Frames & Moments: Peter's Hilarious, Touching, & Amazing Videos

Chapter Twenty-one: Medical Mirth: How Peter Kept His Doctors Laughing

Chapter Twenty-two: Choosing Compassion: Shepherding Special Olympics, Orphans, Emergency Counseling, and Special Needs

Chapter Twenty-three: A Habit of Thoughtfulness: Peter's Joyful Giving To Family & Friends

Chapter Twenty-four: Fighting The Good Fight, Wielding The Sword Of Faith: Peter's Extraordinary Journey Through Terminal Stage Four Metastatic Prostate, Lymph Node, & Bone Cancer

Chapter Twenty-five: Scenes From Our Beautiful Love Story: Decades Sustained By Caring, Communication & Commitment

Chapter Twenty-six: Conclusion

Chapter Twenty-seven Farewell

I sincerely hope that you will join me - and all who care about and support Peter - in the full fascinating journey of Peter's life, which the completed hardbound book will provide.

National Security Author *Laura Helen Foy*

FOREWORDS
• Vice Admiral Douglas J. Katz, USN (Retired)
• Vice Admiral George P. Nanos, Jr., USN (Retired)
• Brigadier General James R. Schwenk, USMC (Retired)

Foreword by
Douglas J. Katz
Vice Admiral
United States Navy (Retired)

The United States Naval Academy, the United States Surface Fleet, and the Pentagon are three unique and fascinating environs which can only be described and viscerally conveyed by a Warfighter who has actively lived and deeply experienced each. With my having been privileged to have shared each of these venues with Peter Douglas Blackledge during our more than forty years of special friendship and professional collaboration, I personally know Peter to have the extraordinary insights as well as the wit and wisdom to bring these to life in this important memoir. Peter is truly an exceptional individual who has been a standout during his Midshipman days, Naval career, and Pentagon tours. I was honored to have been a member of the special Flag Board of senior United States Navy and United States Marine Corps Flag Officers as well as senior United States Government Senior Executives who oversaw the 2019 United States Naval Academy's dedication, christening, and launch of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE, '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell at the United States Naval Academy's historic Hubbard Hall. The more than 150 attendees who traveled from across our country to honor Peter at that ceremony exemplify the esteem with which Peter is held. There's no one who ever met Peter who wasn't impressed with his devotion, dedication and exceptional patriotism. He set his standards high and we all learned by his example. There could not be a better friend and I am honored to have served with this remarkable man. Peter, I salute you.

Douglas J. Katz

Douglas J. Katz
Vice Admiral
United States Navy (Retired)

Foreword by
George P. Nanos, Jr.
Vice Admiral
United States Navy (retired)

There are many men who have accomplished great things and are accordingly given due recognition in their time, but there are far fewer who have brought a sense of joy and excitement while doing so. The energy Peter Blackledge brought to his work and relationships not only gave a sense of importance to the routine, it also drew others into active participation in his vision.

From our time as members of the Twenty Second Company at the Naval Academy to his time working as an important Director on the Secretary of the Navy's acquisition staff, he has lived his life and pursued his career at full throttle. His life is a masterclass on how personal effort and a positive spirit by one individual can affect so many - the essence of leadership. Laura Foy has brought Peter's story to us, so that we don't lose his reminder of the importance of faith, hard work and joy.

George P. Nanos, Jr.

George P Nanos, Jr.
Vice Admiral
United States Navy (Retired)

Foreword by
Brigadier General James R. Schwenk
United States Marine Corps (Retired)

This "Celebration of Life" memoir paints a fascinating picture of Pete's unique and exciting life; of his many extraordinary experiences; of his success at every level; and of his steadfast compassion for others. Pete's remarkable experiences are not only entertaining and enjoyable to read, they resonate in a profound way with the reader, and are informative to each of us. This memoir is truly engrossing, and I commend it to you.

I have known Pete since the fall of 1966, when we were members of the United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Rowing Team. I was one year behind Pete at the Academy, and I wished I could row like Pete and be a man like Pete. He was tall, good-looking (his classmates at the boat house dubbed him "Hollywood"), and he treated everyone with dignity and respect. He had the most erect posture I've ever seen in an oarsman, and it helped him generate an immense amount of power in each stroke. I often tried to row more like Pete, but never succeeded. Pete also helped make the freshmen oarsmen feel like they were a valued part of the Navy rowing team, for which my classmates and I were greatly appreciative.

The Academy's rowing program is one of the best and toughest in the country; its practices are grueling, and competition for racing seats is fierce. Pete excelled at each challenge, graduating as a multi-year Varsity letterman and an Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) 2V8 National Champion. Pete's National Champion boat dramatically and decisively won its IRA Regatta of 14 top rowing colleges, beating nearest competitor University of Pennsylvania by two full lengths, and having even more open water on Wisconsin, Cornell, Washington, Syracuse, California, Rutgers, Princeton, UCLA, Brown, Northeastern, and Stanford. His championship boat's impressive victory brought the Kennedy Challenge Trophy back to the Naval Academy for only the fifth time in history. Pete was one of my first role models outside my family.

Pete not only survived but thrived in the Academy's very challenging environment. In addition to distinguishing himself in competitive collegiate rowing, Pete excelled academically. Despite Pete having chosen the Academy's most difficult major of Nuclear Engineering / Applied Science, he graduated in the top half of his class. Statistically, one out of every three Naval Academy Midshipman do not make it to graduation. Therefore, there is a definite pride which comes to every Midshipman who survives the four years of exceptional challenges, to receive their diploma and their active-duty commission. Pete completed it all with consistent excellence.

Following his graduation, Pete's achievements during his active-duty years were uniquely outstanding, as he was advanced early at each rank. Very few officers in the Navy are advanced early. Being recognized in this manner repeatedly by the Navy indicates a truly superb young officer with a bright future who had earned the respect of seniors, peers, and subordinates.

In 1977, having completed his active military obligation, Pete was personally recruited by Naval Sea Systems Command to be their first Lead Engineer and Manager of a new Gas Turbine initiative. During his next 25 years, Pete was repeatedly selected to be the first Manager/Director for a series of new offices, including as Naval Sea Systems Command's first Senior Combat Systems Development Manager, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's first Director for Naval Warfare, and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's first Director for Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships. This speaks volumes about the respect Pete had earned as a leader, because special care is always taken in selecting the first Manager or Director.

Pete's academic, leadership, and performance excellence was further evidenced throughout these 25 years by his selection for, and outstanding performance in, a series of advanced Department of Defense schools, with Pete graduating at the top of each class. Two of these warrant particular note: At the distinguished Defense Systems Management College (DSMC), Pete not only graduated at the top of his class, he also was elected Leader of his class. The DSMC Commandant, Brigadier General Richard A. Black, was so impressed by Pete's performance that he wrote a personal laudatory letter to Pete's boss, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Honorable John W. Douglass, in which Brigadier General Black stated "I want to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Peter Blackledge, Director for Naval Warfare, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, for his outstanding performance as Section Leader of the Advanced Program Management Course. His leadership and perseverance in the execution of the myriad duties required of a Section Leader were invaluable to the overall success of his section. His management, enthusiasm, and presentation skills are extraordinary, and the students gladly followed his lead. My personal thanks for a job well done." This was followed by a personal letter to Pete from Honorable John W. Douglass, in which Secretary Douglass congratulated and thanked Pete for his outstanding performance. Even more remarkable was when Pete was honored by his being selected for the highly competitive and prestigious Department of Defense (DoD) Executive Study Program (ESP). Pete again was elected student leader by his colleagues, and he not only successfully completed all requirements to be certified at DoD's highest level of DoD Acquisition Professional, he also was awarded a Master of Science (MS) degree, graduated at the very top of his class, and was formally named "Distinguished Graduate". Dr. Linda Brandt, Chair of National Defense University, wrote a lengthy personal letter to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy stating "I am writing to commend a member of your staff. Mr. Peter Blackledge compiled an absolutely superb record of academic achievement throughout this demanding senior level post-graduate

program. Mr. Blackledge quickly established himself as one of the intellectual leaders in the class through his keen insight, articulate debate, and cogent writing. His faculty members praised his performance throughout the year, proclaiming him a "natural leader" who "repeatedly demonstrated his strategic thinking abilities." As Seminar Leader, he led eleven GS-14/15 civilian students and O-5/O-6/O-7 Army/Navy/Air Force military officers, including a Brazilian Navy Captain and a Polish Brigadier General. Peter Blackledge is an exemplary senior leader - a standout among the best and brightest."

In 2002, having served the Department of the Navy for 37 years, Pete reached retirement age. Pete's sustained excellence resulted in his being aggressively pursued by numerous top defense contractors. After careful consideration, Pete accepted the position of Vice President for the premier Fortune 500 company Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC). In that position, Pete was repeatedly recognized for developing many significant policies and procedures for the U.S. Navy. Pete's performance was so outstanding that the Chief of Naval Operations' Director and Navy' s Chief Information Officer wrote a two-page "LETTER OF COMMENDATION FOR MR. PETER D. BLACKLEDGE" to SAIC's Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer, stating "I would like to take this opportunity to commend the superlative performance of your SAIC employee, Mr. Peter Blackledge, in his support to the Deputy Chief of Operations for Communications Networks (DCNO N6) and the Navy Chief Information Officer…..He has superbly represented DCNO(N6) and Navy CIO at senior government and industry forums, and his products have had substantial impact in both the Navy and Department-wide. In 2003, Mr. Blackledge authored the Navy's first Report to Congress on FORCEnet, which was promulgated by the Secretary of the Navy as the Department's strategy for spiral development of Net Centric Warfare (NCW) capabilities. In 2004, Mr. Blackledge authored the Navy's first Joint NCW requirements, which were implemented by the OPNAV NCW Director to align Navy programs to the Global Information Grid (GIG) and were cited as a key accomplishment in the Navy CIO's testimony to Congress. In 2005, Mr. Blackledge authored the Navy's first FORCEnet Requirements/Capabilities and Compliance (FRCC) Policy, which was promulgated Department-wide by the DCNO and implemented in all Navy warfighting programs. In 2006, Mr. Blackledge authored an expanded policy and certification process for all business as well as warfighting programs, which was endorsed by both the DCNO and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development, and Acquisition) as part of the update to a key Secretary of the Navy Instruction. In 2007, Mr. Blackledge authored the first Navy Enterprise Architecture & Data Strategy (NEADS) Policy, which was promulgated by the Navy CIO and was implemented Navy-wide ……. Mr. Blackledge is a credit to the Navy and to SAIC. Please convey to Mr. Blackledge my appreciation and commendation for his exemplary service."

In 2010, after more than 45 years of outstanding service in and in support of the United States Navy, Pete retired. We should be thankful for all Pete did for our nation during those many years of selfless service.

What makes this memoir so exciting is the series of unique experiences and adventures which permeate every decade of Pete's life and every chapter of this book. Many of these have become legendary; e.g. , Pete's One-On-One with iconic World War II combat hero Admiral Arleigh "31 Knots" Burke - who was the longest serving Chief of Naval Operations in history; and Pete's One-On-One with the infamous Congressman Charlie Wilson - who personally led support for the

Afghan Freedom Fighters in their resistance against the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, and who was the subject of the award-winning movie "Charlie Wilson's War", starring Tom Hanks as Charlie Wilson, and with Julia Roberts. The adventure which particularly awestruck me and my fellow Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight oarsmen was when Pete in 1988 was personally recruited by Allen Rosenberg - the revered Olympic Gold Medalist and Rowing Hall of Fame member, and the Rowing Coach who was responsible for 24 Gold and Silver medals at the Olympics and World Championships. Allen Rosenberg personally requested that Pete row the "Power Seat" in a racing boat which Coach Rosenberg was putting together to compete in International Masters competition. Allen personally trained Pete and Allen's chosen Stroke oarsman on his ERG rowing machine for eight months, and then trained his entire chosen eight-man rowing team on the water. The result was truly impressive. In its first outing, that amazing boat dramatically and decisively won the iconic "Crab Feast Regatta" in Washington DC, crushing every competing college rowing team and the previously undefeated Potomac Boat Club. Pete's champion boat next won the Occoquan Regatta, and then flew to Canada where Pete and his fellow champion oarsmen won Gold and Silver medals in each of its multiple races in the Canadian Masters Championship Regatta in Welland, Ontario, and the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta in St. Catherine's, Ontario. At the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta, the USA National Olympic Rowing Team had their picture taken with Pete and his championship boat members. Naval Sea Systems Command's premier magazine "The Observer" dedicated its entire front page to congratulate Pete's championship boat on its extraordinary successes.

Rowing is in Pete's blood. Pete's father was United States Naval Academy Class of 1920, and his class led the Naval Academy Men's Eight to the Gold Medal at the VII Olympiad in Antwerp, Belgium. Pete's mother personally rowed for the Yokohama Boat Club in the 1920s when she was in the U.S. Foreign Service and posted in Japan.

Pete never forgot his United States Naval Academy and Varsity Heavyweight Rowing roots. He made multiple donations to the Academy over the years, including fulfilling the Naval Academy's sacred 150-year tradition of honor by generously donating five Navy Crew Racing Shells. Three of these shells are particularly notable, as follows:

In 1984, Pete persuaded his siblings to join with him in donating the "CAPT ALLAN BLACKLEDGE" shell to honor Pete's recently deceased father. That shell was rowed to victory at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships, and after many additional victorious years was permanently installed in a position of unique honor by being affixed to the ceiling of the Naval Academy's Varsity Rowing Awards Room in the Naval Academy's historic Hubbard Hall, the home of Navy rowing.

In 2019, Pete donated the "United States Naval Academy Class Of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell" to honor his class on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of their graduation, as well to honor as the 100th Anniversary of his father's Naval Academy graduation (Pete's father's Naval Academy Class of 1920 was graduated in 1919, under a compressed schedule due to World War I), and the 150th Anniversary of the Naval Academy's rowing program. The shell was dedicated, christened, and launched in Pete's name during a magnificent ceremony conceived and orchestrated by Pete. Pete arranged for the distinguished U.S. Navy Band to perform to open the ceremony, and he downloaded the top 1960s music hits which he played through his Bose Stereo System during

his arranged 150-person luncheon following the completion of the ceremony. Pete additionally arranged for the ceremony to be overseen by a "Flag Review Board", comprised of retired U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Flag Officers and U.S. Government Senior Executives with whom Pete had worked during his service in the Fleet, Pentagon, and Department of Defense. Pete also arranged for the "Pentagon Chaplin" to give the Benediction. Pete presented to each ceremony attendee one of the 300 impressive 40-page Blue & Gold Commemorative Keepsake Programs which Pete had personally designed and authored and had arranged for the Naval Academy to publish. Pete also presented to the attendees the USA Flag which Pete had arranged to be flown over the U.S. Capitol to honor Pete's event and his Naval Academy class, and also presented the official Mayoral Proclamation which Pete had arranged to be signed by the Mayor of Biloxi Mississippi honoring Pete's father and Pete's event. Pete additionally arranged for his U.S. Naval Academy Class Of 1969 crest, and his class motto "Non Sibi Sed Patriae", to be permanently inscribed on the interior of the shell. For the christening, Pete called up to his podium Naval Academy's champion oarsmen - including the 1960 U.S. Olympic rowing team; 1963 Freshman U.S. Olympic Trials rowing team; 1965 "Clean Sweep" National Champions; 1967 2V8 National Champions; 1971 Eastern Sprint and VFW and 2V8 National Champions; the Naval Academy's Champion Coaches; and representatives of The United States Naval Academy's Great Class Of 1969. As those members came to Pete's podium, Pete presented each with a Gold Christening Cup which he had individually enclosed in Navy Blue textured wrapping paper and tied with Navy Gold satin ribbons. Each of those persons then unwrapped their Gold Christening Cups, scooped ceremonial "Severn Finish Line" water from the Naval Academy's revered 1918 National Championship Trophy silver bowl, and christened the shell by pouring the water over its bow. The christening was completed by Pete pouring the remainder of the water from the 1918 trophy over the shell's bow. Members of the Naval Academy's Varsity Heavyweight rowing team then ported the shell to the water, and rowed it in exposition as ceremony attendees together sang "Navy Blue And Gold" from the words which Pete had posted in the Commemorative Program. Pete then treated each of the 150 attendees to a free "Warrior's Lunch" of "Meals Ready To Eat", just as is provided to military personnel during actual military operations in the field. The official U.S. Navy Photographer took more than 980 pictures of the event, and the United States Naval Academy devoted a full page of its Navy Crew Newsletter to pictorial and textual coverage of the ceremony. My wife and I thoroughly loved and enjoyed the amazing day.

In 2024, Pete conceptualized and orchestrated what I consider to be his most meaningful contribution to Navy crew and beyond. For the occasion of the 55th Anniversary of the graduation of Pete's class, Pete donated a MEMORIAL shell to honor his deceased U.S. Naval Academy classmates, Varsity Heavyweight Rowing teammates and coaches, and family members. This event particularly demonstrated Pete's dedication, courage, resolve, and strength of character, because in 2023 Pete had been diagnosed with terminal Stage Four Advanced Metastatic Prostate Cancer, Lymph Node Cancer, and Bone Cancer. The debilitating effects of Pete's Cancers and Chemotherapy were sadly evident in Pete's appearance and energy, but despite his being greatly emaciated and slumped over in his wheelchair, Pete gave an eloquent tribute to honorees. Pete presented each attendee with an embossed 3-inch lapel pin which he had designed and purchased, on which were inscribed the Naval Academy Class of 1969 crest and the words "They Shall Not Be Forgotten". Pete also designed individual memorial badges of the deceased honorees which displayed the words "They Shall Not Be Forgotten" and which included the individual picture of each of the deceased honorees, which he presented to the Widows and family members of the

deceased. Pete arranged for the Naval Academy Class of 1969 Chaplain to give the Benediction. Widows and family members of the deceased flew in from all over the country, so appreciative to be able to see their loved ones so beautifully honored. Pete's Class Of 1969 attended to particularly honor their Fallen, who in Abraham Lincoln's words "gave the last full measure of devotion", with classmates specifically selected to honor each of their individual 17 Fallen honorees. The christening was very emotional, as family after family of those honored deceased rose to participate by helping to christen the MEMORIAL shell. Pete had bought a vintage brass U.S. Navy bell, and as he called out the name of each deceased honoree he rang the bell once as he announced each name - in the manner used to honor the 9/11 victims - as each representative of their deceased then came forward to take their Gold Christening Cup, scoop out the ceremonial water, and pour the water over the bow of MEMORIAL to christen MEMORIAL. It was heart rending to watch as each Widow and family member of their deceased poured ceremonial water over MEMORIAL's bow, and viscerally and plaintively called out the name of their beloved deceased. Pete presented to each of the Widows and family members of the deceased special Navy Blue Embossed Glass Champagne Flutes which Pete had designed and purchased and had inscribed with the crest of the United States Naval Academy Class of 1969 and the words "They Shall Not Be Forgotten." The ceremony was a truly compassionate and giving tribute by Pete, and the day itself was one of the most memorable of my life.

Pete was someone I tried to emulate as a midshipman, and I find myself still trying to emulate him today. I am honored to call him my friend.

James R. Schwenk

James R. Schwenk
Brigadier General
United States Marine Corps (Retired)

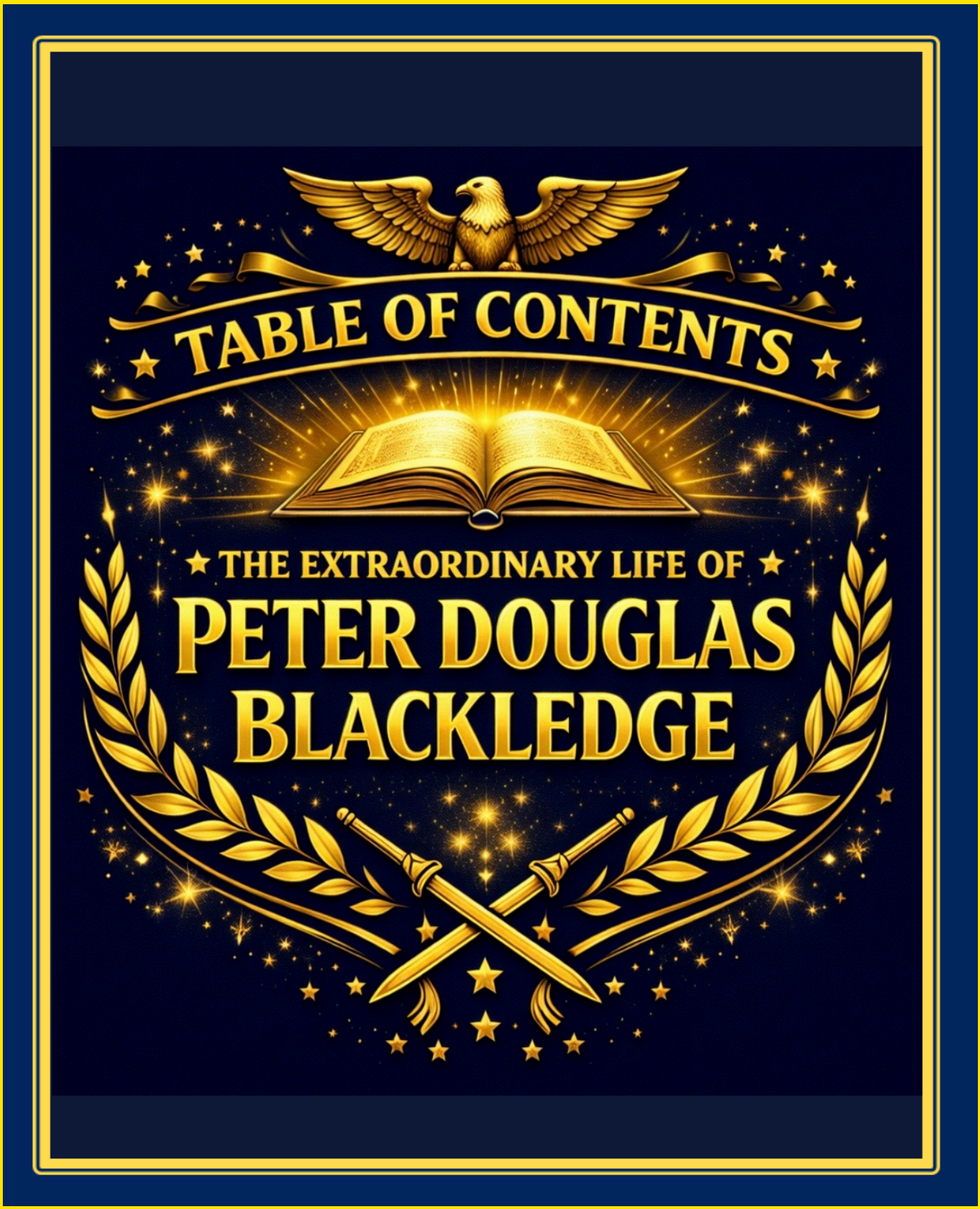


TABLE OF CONTENTS
THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF
PETER DOUGLAS
BLACKLEDGE

Table of Contents (TOC)

Note: Items listed in the TOC can be viewed by clicking on the title or by scrolling down.

DEDICATION **2**

HONORING THE LIFE OF **2**

AUTHOR'S NOTE TO READER 6

FOREWORDS **8**

FOREWORD BY VICE ADMIRAL DOUGLAS J. KATZ, UNITED STATES NAVY (RETIRED) 9
FOREWORD BY VICE ADMIRAL GEORGE P. NANOS, JR, UNITED STATES NAVY (RETIRED) 10
FOREWORD BY BRIGADIER GENERAL JAMES R. SCHWENK, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS (RETIRED) 11

INTRODUCTION **22**

CHAPTER 1 PETER'S VIGNETTES: PROFOUND PASSAGES ALONG THE WAY **27**

I WAS SALUTED & BESEECHED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES 28
A TALE OF TWO COTTON BOWL QUEENS, AND AMAZING STORY OF U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY'S ONLY FOOTBALL BOWL QUEEN IN HISTORY 31
THE REMARKABLY ROMANTIC AND UNIQUE COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE OF MY PARENTS 36
BOXING FATHER 41
FIFTY SHADES OF LAMAR AND ELYSIAN PICNICS 43
WHO THREW THAT BUXOM NAKED WOMAN INTO THE POOL? 43
FROM RECEIVING A STANDING OVATION TO BEING SPAT ON AND BEING CALLED "BABY KILLER" 46
"YOU WILL BE ASSIMILATED; 48
RESISTANCE IS FUTILE" 49
THEY MADE YOU DO WHAT??? 50

CHANNELING SISYPHUS: THE ETERNAL NOBLE SUFFERING OF A PLEBE....51
CALIFORNIA DREAMIN': HAPPINESS COMES IN WAVES....54
PLEBE YEAR IN 1916 FOR UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY CLASS OF 1020....55
RECALLING THE FABLED 1965-1969 "GLORY YEARS" OF "THE GREAT U.S. NAVAL ACADEEMY CLASS OF 1969"....58
SEVERN RIVER ECHOES: USNA ROWING MEMORIES FROM THE DAYS OF WOODEN SHELLS & IRON OARSMEN....92
BECOMING A ROWING NATIONAL CHAMPION....96
RECRUITED BY OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST & ROWING HALL OF FAME COACH ALLEN ROSENBERG: BECOMING AN INTERNATIONAL ROWING MASTERS CHAMPION....99
STEEL ON STATION, MISSILES READY, WATCH UNBROKEN: SURFACE WARFARE OFFICERS STANDING THE LINE AGAINST THE MENACING RED TIDE....107
HONEST, XO, WE NEVER NOTICED THAT MOTORCYCLE IN THE CENTER OF OUR STATEROOM....109
MY JOURNEY THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS....111
Stranger In A Strange Land....113
Disco Made Me Do It!!! Feeling The Perm....114
If You Think I'm Sexy, Come On Sugar Tell Me So....115
THE BALLAD OF THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE (SES)....116
FROM THE LOUVRE & CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES TO BUDDHIST TEMPLES & GREAT WALL OF CHINA – MY AROUND-THE-WORLD ADVENTURE....119

CHAPTER 2 EPIC ILLUMINATIONS OF A REMARKABLE LIFE: PETER'S NOVELLAS....123

"FINDING MY OMEGA"....124
A FOWL ABDUCKTION IN THE STATE OF TEXAS: PETER TRIES TO "WEB-ENABLE" HIS GIRLFRIEND'S HOUSE....138
CAPTURING THE WILD TEXAS ARMADILLO....140
PHILO MCGIFFIN....142
THE IRRESISTIBLE ALLURE OF UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY VARSITY HEAVYWEIGHT OARSMEN....149
OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL ROWING TRADITION OF UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY....152
REQUIEM FOR AMERICA'S LAST CICADA....156
RINGING THE BELL:....159
THE LONGEST GOODBYE:....160
THE ENTHRALLING LEGEND OF "LAURA: THE MAIDEN OF CAPE MAY"....163
PETER'S ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH ADMIRAL ARLEIGH BURKE – TWO HOURS WITH A NAVY LEGEND -....164
MY ONE-ON-ONE MEETING WITH NOTORIOUS CONGRESSMAN CHARLIE WILSON....166
GROWING UP AVIS....168

CHAPTER 3 FASCINATING FRAMES & MOMENTS: PETER'S HILARIOUS, TOUCHING, & AMAZING VIDEOS....175

PETER'S HILARIOUS & AMAZING MUSIC VIDEO TO CELEBRATE LAURA'S SISTER ALISON TURNING 60 "I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE NOT MUCH LONGER YOU'LL BE 59"....176
THE GLORY YEARS OF U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY CLASS OF 1969....177
SWEET, AMAZING ABIGAIL....178
LAMAR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1965 CHAMPAGNE & PIZZA PARTY....181
PETER'S HILARIOUS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH TO THE OUTRAGEOUS "MOST BELOVED SIBLING" CONTEST....183
PETER'S BEAUTIFULLY ROMANTIC & AMAZING BIRTHDAY SURPRISE FOR LAURA: PETER FLEW IN LAURA'S FAMILY AND HIRED A CHAUFFEURED MOONROOF LIMOUSINE....186

Laura's Birthday Surprise #2: Peter Secretly Gathered Laura's Favorite Work Colleagues 188
Peter & Laura Perform A Hilarious Air-Guitar Dance Video To Celebrate The Birthday Of Laura's Sister Alison 189
"Becoming Blue & Gold": United Stattes Naval Academy Honors Peter Douglas Blackledge By Producing A Video Of His Life 190
Peter's Salsa Dance Demonstration 191
United States Naval Academy Dedicates The "Peter Blackledge, '69" Navy Crew Shell 192
Peter's 2024 MEMORIAL Dedication Ceremony Honoring Fallen & Deceased 195
Peter Blackledge Is Specially Surprise-Honored By His Montebello "Dancing At Dusk" Dance Students at New Years 218
Peter "Dr. Dance" Blackledge Provides A Public Service Announcement Appealing For A Cure To The Devastating Case Of "Can't-Dance-Al-Gore- Syndrome" Which Had Tragically Struck Laura's Sister Alison 219
Peter Blackledge Planned, Coordinated, And Led Montebello's First MMMVFS Military Veterans Celebration Of Memorial Day, 2023. It includes brief stirring personal interviews arranged by Peter and conducted by "The Times Of Montebello " staff with Montebello Residents who were in, or had loved ones in, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, or other major conflicts. 220
Peter Blackledge Planned, Coordinated, And Led Montebello's Historic First-Ever Celebration Of National Vietnam War Veterans Day, On The 50th Anniversary Of The Event 221
Peter & Laura: A Bears' Retrospective 222
Lamar '65 Champagne & Pizza Party 223
Laura's Birthday Surprise Chauffeured Limo 224
Peter & Laura (aka "The Beatle Bears") make their musical debut with an original video honoring Chicago Celebrity Alison's birthday. 225
Laura's Birthday Surprise # 2 "Work Colleagues" 226
Peter Blackledge Memorial Video, Most Beloved Sibling Contest (1992) 227
Abigail Wishes, "Please Get Well, Peter" 228
Peter Blackledge Memorial Video: Exposition of US Naval Academy Racing Shell "PETER BLACKLEDGE, '69" 229

CHAPTER 4 A HABIT OF THOUGHTFULNESS: PETER'S JOYFUL GIVING TO FAMILY & FRIENDS 230

What I Want You To Know About Peter's Joyful Giving 231
Peter Very Touchingly Honored The Beautiful Couple Doug and Sharon 232
Alison's and Steve's 50th College Reunion 234
Making Vickey The "Birthday Girl" 236
Honoring The Memory Of Olivia 240
Annapolis Tributes, Russian Poetry, & A Swiss Music Box 241
Huckleberry For President 245
Encouraging Gary 246
"Make Me Puke" Award 247

CHAPTER 5 SCENES FROM OUR BEAUTIFUL LOVE STORY: DECADES SUSTAINED BY CARING, COMMUNICATION & COMMITMENT 248

What I Want You To Know About Peter 249
Our First Meeting 251
Laura Moves into Montebello 252

THE ENTHRALLING LEGEND OF "LAURA: THE MAIDEN OF CAPE MAY" 253
The Enthralling Legend of "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May" 254
PANDERING TO PLUMPTIOUS PANDA BEARS 255
COME ALONG AND GROW OLD WITH ME 256
WHAT THE FASHIONABLE EASTER BUNNY WILL WEAR IN 2025 ON THE "PROJECT HIPPITY-HOPPITY RUNWAY" 257
DANCING LIKE JOHN TRAVOLTA 258
TEACHING JOHN TRAVOLTA MOVES TO AGES FOUR THROUGH NINETY-FOUR 259
ABIGAIL BECOMES AN ENDURING DANCIN' QUEEN 260
PRAYING FOR PETER 261
PUMPING IRON 262
IN UTERO COUNTRY-WESTERN LINE DANCING 268
SALSA FEVER 269
SPREADING "DANCE FEAVER" 271
FROM SALSA DANCE FANATIC TO "PETER BACHATA-SEED" 272
TEXAS TWO STEP 275
COUNTRY-WESTERN LINE DANCING 276
ROARING 20S GREAT GATSBY DANCE PARTY 281
WE LOVE JIM ROONEY 282
MONTEBELLO WALKERS BECOME SOLE MATES 283
SUPPORTING OUR MILITARY VETERANS 289
MAKING ALL MY BIRTHDAYS ROMANTIC AND EXTRAORDINARY 298
THE BEAUTIFUL COLLAGE OF OUR MEMORIES 305
PETER BLACKLEDGE:RENNAISSANCE MAN 306
LAUGHING THROUGH CANCER'S INTENSE PAIN AND CRUSHING FATIGUE 309

CONCLUSION 310

FAREWELL MY BELOVED PETER 313

Introduction

In 2025, Peter's Oncologist informed us that Peter will definitely die from his incurable, terminal, Stage Four Advanced Metastatic Prostate Cancer, Lymph Node Cancer, and Bone Cancer, and that his impending death could be further accelerated by the exacerbation of his existing Severe Heart Disease caused by his Chemotherapy, Androgen Deprivation Therapy, and other Cancer Treatments. Peter's Oncologist and Cardiologist each advised us to quickly "get Peter's affairs in order" before his impending death. As part of the preparation for Peter's impending death, I asked Peter to please work with me in developing his "Celebration Of Life" book which chronicles his life, and which I could keep in remembrance of Peter, share with our families and friends, and provide to attendees at Peter's funeral. In the succeeding months, Peter and I have managed to work through Peter's severe pain and crushing fatigue from his Cancer and Cancer Treatments to produce this book. It is Peter's denouement and legacy. I hope that you will find it as interesting and inspirational as have I.

As we began exploring Peter's life story, I was absolutely astonished at the truly unique and spectacular life which Peter has led. Exploring Peter's life was like experiencing the opening of a magnificent rose, with each new petal even more breathtaking than the last.

Peter grew up in an extraordinary Navy family: Peter's father was born in 1896, a year before Amelia Earhart's birth. He graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1919 to fly a bi-plane in the Navy's fledgling flight program, almost a decade before Earhart's celebrated flight, and in World War II he was the Commanding Officer of the cruiser USS BILOXI (CL-80) during its historic evacuation of POWs from Japan at war's end.

Peter's mother was born in 1907, 13 years before women had the right to vote; but she was one of the first women to work for the State Department and the United States Foreign Service. In that capacity, she worked directly for Secretary of State Kellogg; was selected to be part of U.S. President Calvin Coolidge's historic trip to Cuba aboard battleship Texas; was personally asked by American Consul General to be part of his transcontinental train trip to inspect American Embassies; and served on the historic commission of the League Of Nations in Peiping, China investigating Japanese and Chinese differences in Shanghai and Manchuria. She traveled widely during her United States Foreign Service postings and

assignments in Havana, Buenos Aires, Valparaiso, Santiago, Tokyo, and Peiping; rowed for the Yokohama Boat Club; crossed the Oshima Desert on a camel; dined with Congressmen, expat millionaires, Countesses, and the Counsel General; was escorted to her home by an armed guard force through rioters and machine gun fire during the Argentine Revolution; survived earthquakes, typhoons, and two shipwrecks; endured being adrift for hours in a lifeboat after her ship Monte Cervantes sank in the Straits Of Magellan; watched the Cervantes Captain honorably go down with his ship; was marooned on a convict prison island for weeks until Cervantes' sister ship could be sent for rescue; and was personally invited by the United States Ambassador to attend a special reception in Tokyo honoring the 1927 "Spirit Of St. Louis" first solo non-stop transatlantic pilot Charles Lindbergh.

Peter's sister Penny was elected by Rice University to be their 1958 Rice University Homecoming Queen and Cotton Bowl Queen for the historic game between the United States Naval Academy and Rice University; her twin sister Patti was requested by the United States Naval Academy to be their Queen for that 1958 Cotton Bowl game - the only time in history that the United States Naval Academy had a football bowl Queen, and the only time in history that twin sisters were Queens for opposing teams in a football bowl game; both sisters were flown by Ed Sullivan to appear on his "Ed Sullivan Show" to celebrate this unique event.

Peter's brother Michael was in the United States Naval Academy Class of 1963, graduating first in his class in mathematics, for which he was awarded the Military Order Of Foreign Wars Prize for Excellence in Mathematics.

Peter's exceptionally distinguished 45-year professional career serving in and in support of the United States Navy was certainly impressive in itself, and strong testimony to his commitment to our nation. But, to me, Peter's extraordinary range of endeavors and accomplishments outside his professional life were even more stunning, making this Renaissance Man truly remarkable. Peter's amalgam of adventures would make even Forest Gump jealous: Being personally selected by United States President Lyndon Johnson for nomination to attend the United States Naval Academy; being personally saluted by United States President Richard Nixon, who requested Peter's permission to board Peter's warship; despite having grown up a skinny kid in Texas without ever seeing a rowing shell, becoming a United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman, and in 1967 becoming the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) 2V8 National Champion, thereby bringing the coveted Kennedy Trophy back to the United States Naval Academy for only the fifth time in history; training in Karate under World Karate Champion Chuck Norris; being recruited by Olympic Gold Medalist and Hall of Fame Rowing Coach Allen Rosenberg to row in International Masters Competition, in which Peter won Gold and Silver medals in each race; being cited by "Volleyball Magazine" for his performance in an outdoor Triples Volleyball Tournament; being honored by the United States Naval Academy in production of a video of his extraordinary "Becoming Blue and Gold" life; being honored by the United States Naval Academy in dedication, christening, and launching the "PETER BLACKLEDGE, '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell in a special ceremony at the United States Naval Academy's historic Hubbard Hall, with more than 150 U.S. Navy and U.S Marine Corps Flag Officers, U.S. Government Senior Executives, and United States Naval Academy U.S. Olympic oarsmen in attendance; becoming the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's first Director for Naval Warfare, with Executive Oversight over all United States combat systems on all surface ships and submarines

and their multi-billion dollar funding; becoming the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's first Director for Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships, with Executive Oversight over all United States Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships and their multi-billion dollar funding; being honored by 57 Navy performances awards, with the Assistant Secretary of the Navy twice personally awarding Peter the Navy's second highest medal; leading a senior, multinational delegation, including a Polish General, on an official around-the-world inspection of foreign industrial facilities; being commended for his Humanitarian works by Christian Children's Fund for his financially and emotionally supporting orphaned and impoverished children, and by Birthright charity for his volunteer work counseling and supporting women, and by Wellspring charity for his volunteer work with children and adults who have Down's Syndrome or mental illness, and by the Mayor of the District of Columbia for his volunteer work supporting the D.C. Special Olympics; being granted a one-on-one meeting with legendary Admiral Arleigh Burke, to discuss Admiral Burke's role as Chief of Naval Operations during the failed "Bay Of Pigs" invasion of Cuba; being granted a one-on-one meeting with Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Vern Clark to discuss Peter's successful implementation of Admiral Clark's top priority: FORCEnet; being granted a one-on-one meeting with notorious Congressman Charlie Wilson (the subject of the award-winning movie "Charlie Wilson's War", with Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, and Phillip Seymour Hoffman) to advise Congressman Wilson on potential Navy weapon systems to arm Afghan Freedom Fighters; and being recruited to be Vice President of the Fortune 500 company Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC).

But there were also experiences of profound sadness. One was Peter's personally experiencing the stark societal dichotomy brought by the Vietnam War: Three years after Peter's joyful 1964 receipt of a standing ovation from his entire 1,000-person Houston, Texas high school for being personally nominated by President Lyndon Johnson to attend the United States Naval Academy, Peter, in 1967, was spat upon and cursed and called "Baby Killer" in the Houston, Texas airport for simply wearing his military uniform. Peter wept at his having worked so diligently to fulfill President John F. Kennedy's call to serve his country, and having foregone the pleasures of a civilian college in order to endure the privations of austere United States Naval Academy training, and his resultantly being reviled for his patriotism and dedication. A second sadness seemed to again be a repudiation of Peter's always striving to do his best. In 2023, despite his lifelong dedication to good health, Peter was blindsided by a diagnosis of terminal Stage Four Advanced Metastatic Prostate Cancer, Lymph Node Cancer, and Bone Cancer. Peter candidly shares his experience with this struggle in a later chapter of this book.

Peter's life has been the full panoply of experience and emotion, and exploring it was like reading a captivating novel: Once I started, I couldn't stop - immersing myself in an even deeper and more profound love and respect for this wonderful man. I hope that you will join with me on this fascinating journey of Peter's extraordinary life.

Peter and I want to express our deepest gratitude to Roy Dove, without whom this document and the future hardcover book would not be possible. Roy was a shipmate of Peter's on the Guided Missile Cruiser USS ALBANY (CG10), and both Roy and his wonderful wife Dianne have been our dear friends for the subsequent five decades. Roy's exceptional skill as both editor and technical advisor elevated this work at every stage. His attention to detail, intellectual rigor, and

unwavering commitment to excellence transformed early drafts into a coherent, authoritative, and polished manuscript.

Dianne's kindness in allowing us to take Roy's time for many months, and the unwavering patience and support of both Roy and Dianne, despite the many challenges and delays resulting from our working through Peter's many hospitalizations and his crushing fatigue, have been amazing. This memoir is stronger, clearer, and more enduring because of Roy's and Dianne's contribution, and we are profoundly thankful for their partnership.

United States National Security Author *Laura Helen Foy*

National Security Notification: Portions of this book address Classified information and events, and have been reviewed, vetted, and approved with redaction by the Prepublication Classification Review Board (PCRB) of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Profound Passages Along The Way

Peter's Vignettes:
Profound Passages Along The Way

I Was Saluted & Beseeched
By The
President Of The United States

A True-Life Vignette By Peter Blackledge

ADVANCE COPY TO CDO
SOPA ADMIN MYPT
ESIDENT NIXON WILL ARRIVE MYPT AIR OPS 1345 LOCAL TODAY IN
R FORCE ONE. ALL HANDS INVITED TO ATTEND.

(Official White House photograph. Left to Right: President Nixon, Executive Officer CDR Gowing, Executive Officer Gowing's wife, Commanding Officer CAPT Elliott's wife, Command Duty Officer Peter Blackledge)

In 1973, I was a young Navy Lieutenant serving aboard the guided missile cruiser USS ALBANY (CG-10). One of my shipmates was David Eisenhower, the grandson of former U.S. President Dwight David Eisenhower. David was married to Julie Nixon Eisenhower, the daughter of then-U.S. President Richard Nixon.

(Left to Right: Julie Nixon Eisenhower, Ensign David Eisenhower)

I had gotten to know the very intelligent David Eisenhower very well during our long philosophical conversations while we were standing watches together in ALBANY's Combat Information Center. And my wife, Barb, and I had both been fortunate to get to know David's beautiful, delightful wife, Julie Nixon Eisenhower, due to Julie having joined Barb Blackledge, Dianne Dove, Jean Cannan and other wives of ALBANY Junior Officers in following ALBANY from port-to-port during ALBANY's 6-month Mediterranean cruise.

(Media Photograph. Left-to-Right: Barb Blackledge, Julie Nixon Eisenhower, Dianne Dove exploring Barcelona, Spain)

I had been very proud to have been the youngest officer in USS ALBANY's history to qualify as Command Duty Officer (CDO) - which meant I had formally qualified to be in charge of the entire ship, particularly in the absence of ALBANY's Commanding Officer. I later learned of the downside of that historic accomplishment: When ALBANY returned to its home base of Mayport, Florida at the conclusion of our 6-month Mediterranean deployment, as the youngest, least senior of ALBANY's Command Duty Officers, I was stuck with the duty of staying aboard ALBANY while ALBANY's Commanding Officer, Executive Officer and every Department Head and Senior Officer on the entire ship went ashore to celebrate and enjoy being back in USA for the first time in six months.

Early the next morning, on the first full day of our being back in USA, Lieutenant (junior grade) David Eisenhower knocked on my stateroom door and said "Pete, I didn't want to tell the Commanding Officer this, because he would have forced the crew to stay aboard to paint and prepare ALBANY - but my father-in-law, President Nixon, is flying down today from Washington D.C. for a surprise visit to ALBANY to see where I work." To be suddenly told that the Commander-In-Chief is coming to the ship of which I was in charge was quite a shock! Sure enough, soon after David's advising me of President Nixon's surprise visit, there was Air Force One landing at our Mayport, Florida airport, and President Nixon along with his wife First Lady Pat, his daughter Julie, his daughter Tricia, and a large throng of White House picture-snapping media arriving at the Albany gangway - each of them formally requesting permission from me (as

ALBANY's Command Duty Officer) to come aboard ALBANY. President Nixon, having been a Naval Officer, knew very well the proper procedure for requesting to board ALBANY. Standing on the pier at the end of ALBANY's brow, he snapped to erect attention, saluted me, and beseeched me "Request permission to come aboard, Sir!!!!"

Fortunately, I had been able to contact ALBANY's Commanding Officer and Executive Officer in time for them to be there with me on ALBANY's Quarterdeck when the President arrived. A formal advance media advisory, which was sent to me (as Command Duty Officer) and the surrounding Mayport, Florida ships and shore establishments, had alerted all to the President's arrival. The White House Photographer took the top picture, in which I, with my hirsute countenance, displayed the then-Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Zumwalt's style endorsed beard. As President Nixon heartily shock my hand, he warmly stated: "So you've got the watch! I've had to stand many watches in my Navy time, so I know what you're having to deal with."

(Official White House photograph. Left to Right: Lieutenant (junior grade) David Eisenhower, President Nixon)

As ALBANY's Command Duty Officer, I then joined ALBANY's Commanding Officer and Executive Officer as Lieutenant (junior grade) David Eisenhower provided a tour of ALBANY to President Nixon.

My receiving the United States of America's President and Commander-In-Chief, having him salute me and request my permission for him to come aboard my ship, was Just Another Manic Monday in This Man's Navy.

A Tale Of
Two Cotton Bowl Queens,
And Amazing Story Of
U.S. Naval Academy's
Only Football Bowl Queen
In History

In 1958, the United States Naval Academy and Rice Institute were major football powers. As Wikipedia notes: "This was the only bowl game of the season that matched two top-ten teams in the final AP poll".

Penny, Patti Blackledge, twin Queens.

TWINS HONORED

DALLAS MORNING NEWS, DEC 15, 1957

Navy Picks 'Queen' For Cotton Bowl

My twin sisters Patti and Penny were both Seniors at Rice in 1958. My sister Penny was elected by Rice to be their Homecoming Queen and their Cotton Bowl Queen. Penny's Homecoming Escort was Fred Woods, who was Captain of the Rice Basketball Team and who would subsequently become my brother-in-law.

RICE HOMECOMING QUEEN

iss Penny Blackledge of 4307 Gramercy, elected Rice omecoming Queen by the student body, was crowned uring the halftime activities at the Rice-Texas football me Saturday night. She was escorted by Fred Wood Tampa, Texas. (Chronicle Photo by Sam Pierson)

As documented in Internet Archive, as well as in RiceCorner.com, AI, and numerous other sources: "Penny Blackledge was Rice's homecoming queen, and thus became the Cotton Bowl Queen. However, when the all-male US Naval Academy found out that Penny had a twin sister Patti, and that Patti and Penny's father, Allan Douglas Blackledge, was a 1920 Graduate of the Naval Academy, they prevailed upon Patti to serve as Navy's Queen for the game."

Thus, Patti became the Naval Academy's only Cotton Bowl Queen in history (the Naval Academy returned queenless to the Cotton Bowl in 1964 under quarterback Roger Staubach), and she was also the only Queen of any football bowl game in Naval Academy's history. Additionally, Patti and Penny together were the only twin sisters in history to be Queens for opposing Football Bowl Teams.

Patti's escort for the game was United States Naval Academy Midshipman First Class and Brigade Commander Charles Larson (shown in this newspaper article, standing next to my sister Patti as he enthusiastically cheered and waved the Naval Academy flag), who subsequently became Admiral Larson and Superintendent of the Naval Academy.

When I was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's Director for Naval Warfare at the Pentagon in the 1990s, I contacted Admiral Larson, who - despite it being four decades since he had escorted Patti - warmly remembered Patti. Admiral Larson and I shared a wonderful one-on-one lunch at the Army Navy Club - at which Admiral Larson spoke glowingly about Patti. It was yet another example to me of how my sister Patti had deeply and enduringly touched so many lives.

Patti was also chosen to represent Rice Institute in the major "Miss Football of 1958" contest, which was won by the University of Mississippi contestant and future Miss America 1959 Mary Ann Mobley. Patti's experience in that contest, as she related to me, was an amazing story in itself!

LET'S ALL GO OUT FOR FOOTBALL!— No coach would have trouble getting a team if Patti Blackledge were on it. What a quarterback she'd make! Anyhow, pretty Patti, 21, will represent Rice Institute in the annual "Miss Football" contest in Berkeley, Cal., Sept. 16-21.

Patti and Penny were also flown to New York City to be featured on the award-winning television show "The Ed Sullivan Show."

I was privileged to further honor Patti and Penny at a special ceremony at the United States Naval Academy's historic Hubbard Hall on October 25, 2019, which was celebrating the dedication, christening, and launch of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE, '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell. Patti and Penny were also featured in the United States Naval Academy's publication of a forty-page Blue & Gold Commemorative Program for that event.

In 2020, I found that Patti and Penny were once again rooting for different teams. I bought them each a ball cap so they could support their respective individual teams.

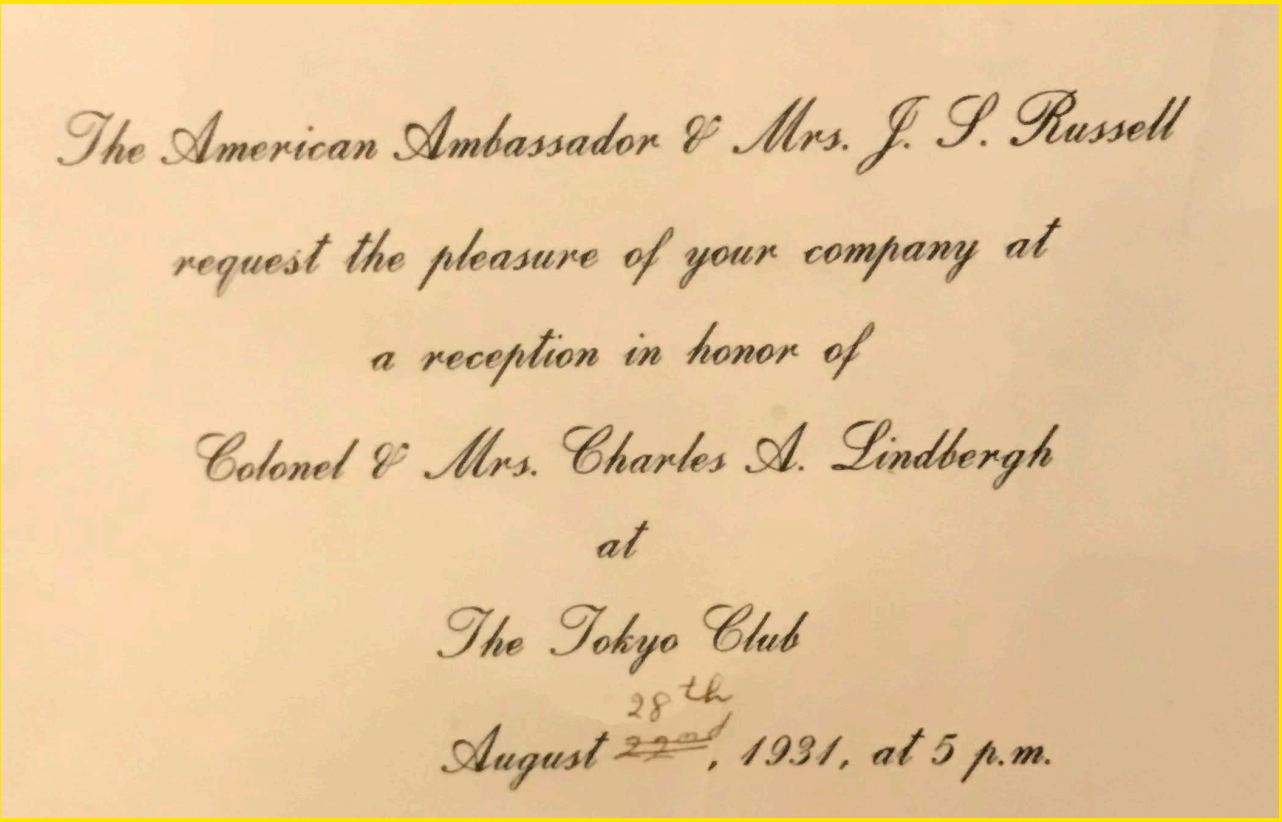
The Remarkably Romantic And Unique Courtship And Marriage Of My Parents

By Peter Blackledge

- From Falling In Love On A Trans-Pacific Ocean Liner, To Courtship in Chefoo, China, To "Major Social Event" Marriage By The U.S. Vice Consul In Tokyo, Japan –

My parents, Dorothy and Allan, met in 1931, while on a Trans-Pacific liner to Japan. Dorothy was on her way to her next Foreign Service posting in Tokyo, Japan, and Allan was on his way to become Executive Officer of USS PARROTT in the China Sea. Theirs became a romance even more enchanting than that of Titanic's Jack and Rose - and fortunately with a much better outcome. Allan was instantly smitten, pursuing Dorothy across the Orient - from Tokyo, Japan to Peiping and Chefoo, China - filling Dorothy's rooms with hundreds of roses. It was during their courtship period in Chefoo where Allan adopted the pet name "Missy" for Dorothy, reflecting the respectful title with which all the Chefoo rickshaw drivers would address Dorothy. "Missy" was a sweet pet name which endured for the entire marriage of Dorothy and Allan, as Allan would always address Dorothy as "Missy" as a way of daily harkening back to the romance of their Chefoo courtship.

As a very handsome young United States Naval Academy Naval Officer and a very beautiful young Foreign Service official known for having worked directly for legendary Secretary of State and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Frank B. Kellogg, Allan and Dorothy became the darlings of what newspapers described as “the younger social set in the English-speaking community of Tokyo.” They were fervently sought after to participate in high-visibility social events, including the American Ambassador’s reception for the acclaimed “Spirit Of St. Louis” transatlantic pilot Charles Lindbergh.


The American Ambassador & Mrs. J. S. Russell

request the pleasure of your company at

a reception in honor of

Colonel & Mrs. Charles A. Lindbergh

at

The Tokyo Club

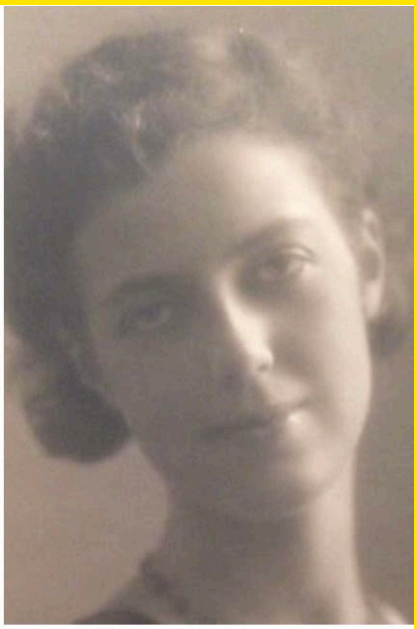
August ~~22nd~~ 28th, 1931, at 5 p.m.

Allan and Dorothy were married in 1934 by the Vice Consul in the American Consul-General's private residence, reported by newspapers as "a major social event."

NAVY OFFICER WEDS MISS FORRANT HERE

Marriage at Consulate-General Culmination of Romance Begun on Pacific Liner

The marriage of Miss Dorothy Forrant and Lieutenant Allan Blackledge took place yesterday afternoon, at the American Consulate-General. Announcement of the impending wedding, which was made on Monday morning, came as a surprise to the members of the younger social set in the English speaking community of Tokyo. Lieutenant Blackledge is the executive officer on the American destroyer Parrott which, with its sister-ships, has been



Allan and Dorothy shared an extraordinarily beautiful marriage together, raising five children who each grew up to carry forth their parents' remarkable legacy. When Dorothy died suddenly of a heart attack in 1971 at the age of 64, Allan was devastated. Allan was still a very handsome, accomplished, and charming man, but he gracefully turned down the many social requests from widows of his United States Naval Academy classmates and so many other women, saying "Missy was the Love Of My Life. I will never stop loving Missy, and only Missy." Eleven years later, as Allan was lying on his deathbed in a nursing home, the eyes of nursing home attendants and visitors would fill with tears as Allan constantly every day and night looked expectantly toward the ceiling of his room, plaintively calling out " I'm coming to you, Missy. I'm coming to you, Missy."

Their deep love endured, and now they permanently reside together beneath a single tombstone in Arlington National Cemetery.

Boxing Father

The attached photograph, circa 1913, shows my father at age 17 wearing boxing gloves as he squared off against his own father at approximate age 50. The background, as relayed to me by my father, was that my father (as a testosterone-laden teenager) had made a challenging remark to his father, and received the reply: "So you think you can take the old man? Let's put on some boxing gloves and find out." That boxing match did not go well for my father, as "The Old Man" soundly trounced my Dad.

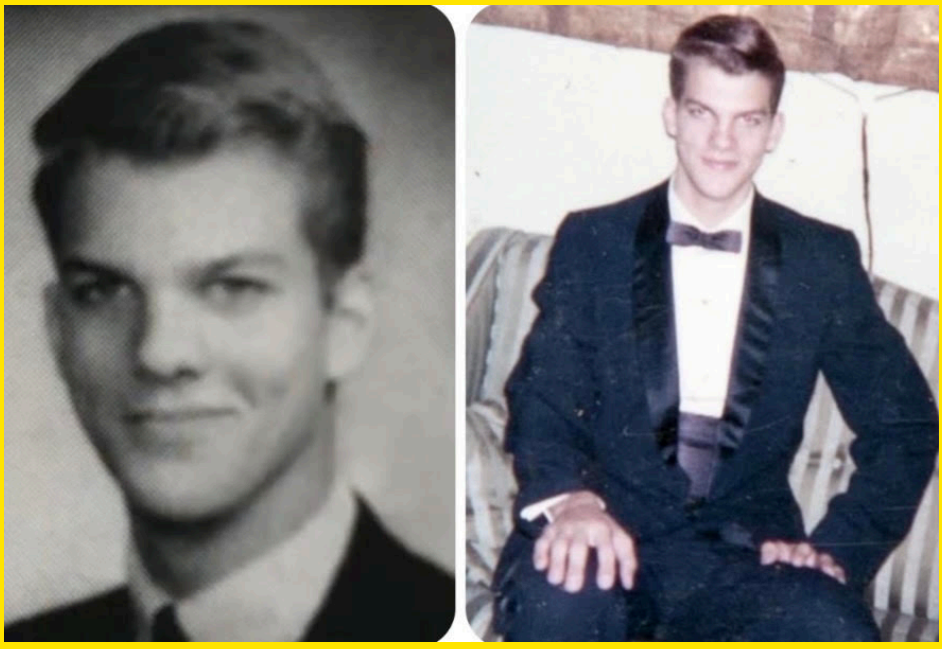
In that historic vein, when I was growing up, my father would often playfully challenge me with the phrase "Any time you think you can knock my ears down, just drop me a postcard." So at age 10, I decided to have some fun with that challenge. I fashioned a fake postcard and stamp out of a piece of paper, wrote on it the special words "I can knock your ears down", approached my unsuspecting father while he was quietly reading the newspaper, "dropped" that fake postcard into my father's lap, and quietly walked away. I had only taken a few steps when heard my father's wonderful laugh. My ten-year-old self had learned a glorious lesson which I would carry through my life: a sense of humor, and particularly an unexpected and quirky sense of humor, brings laughter and joy to those whom I love. It was priceless wisdom.

Fast Times At
Lamar High:
Wild Parties, Hot Cars,
& Beautiful Girls

Fifty Shades Of Lamar
And
Elysian Picnics

By Peter Blackledge

I absolutely loved Lamar: Barreling into the Lamar parking lot each morning with the Lakes Pipes on my beautiful black, tricked-out '57 Chevy open and roaring, then having a group of my favorite female classmates pile into my Chevy to uproariously laugh and squeal as I read aloud torrid passages from the forbidden "Tropic of Capricorn" - which had recently been released from "Obscenity Jail" by a series of obscenity trials in the early 1960s, culminating in the landmark 1964 Supreme Court decision *Grove Press v. Gerstein*, which determined that Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (and by extension, its companion *Capricorn*) was not obscene - and then hanging out with friends at the hall lockers to exchange the latest Lamar news and rumors, and then exuberantly gathering my friends together for lunch "picnic parties" on Lamar's beautiful front lawn - which were catered with hot pizza, fresh fruit, and chilled artificial champagne kindly brought by my retired father - and then joyfully sweating through Lamar's basketball practice with my varsity teammates , followed by pumping iron at the local YMCA after school with a diverse group of Lamar jocks, and on weekends buying my date a Football Mum corsage with pipe cleaner goalposts and dangling ribbons displaying Lamar colors and clanging bells to announce arrivals, or taking my beautiful Stanford-bound high school prom date, Terry, on a Beach Boys "Little Honda" adventure, or participating in one of my IRARI fraternity's notorious beer busts, or escorting one of Lamar's beautiful ladies to any of Houston's popular softly lit bistros. I was ecstatically in High School Heaven, and I wished this Nirvana would never end. Unfortunately, my forthcoming United States Naval Academy experience would be shockingly different.



Who Threw That Buxom Naked Woman Into The Pool?

During Peter's misspent youth and years of riotous living at Lamar High School, Peter's premier "Bad Boy" social fraternity - IRARI - was particularly known for their frequent wild beer bust parties.. Peter decided to add to this Animated Animal House Ambiance by purchasing a very buxom inflatable woman which could be propped up in the corner of the room at parties. This predated the similarly themed 1989 comedic movie "Weekend At Bernie's", so enterprising Peter was more than two decades ahead of his time. Peter generally addressed the sweet young thing as "Polly", short for "Polyurethane", but had additionally ascribed substitute sobriquets including Miss Air-izona, Inflate-a-Belle, Vinyl Vixen, and Lady Latex.

Polly made her grandest debut at an evening outdoor pool party at a rich friend's house in the River Oaks section of Houston. She was the perfect date and party guest. Polly stood in the corner like a silent guest who had arrived early and never been formally introduced—life-sized, buoyantly optimistic, and unapologetically buxom. She was never dismayed or troubled if other females at the party made derogatory remarks about her; Polly would simply maintain her smile with the serene confidence of someone who knew she was inflatable and therefore emotionally invincible. Hats were placed on her head. Sunglasses appeared. Someone even draped a lei around her neck.

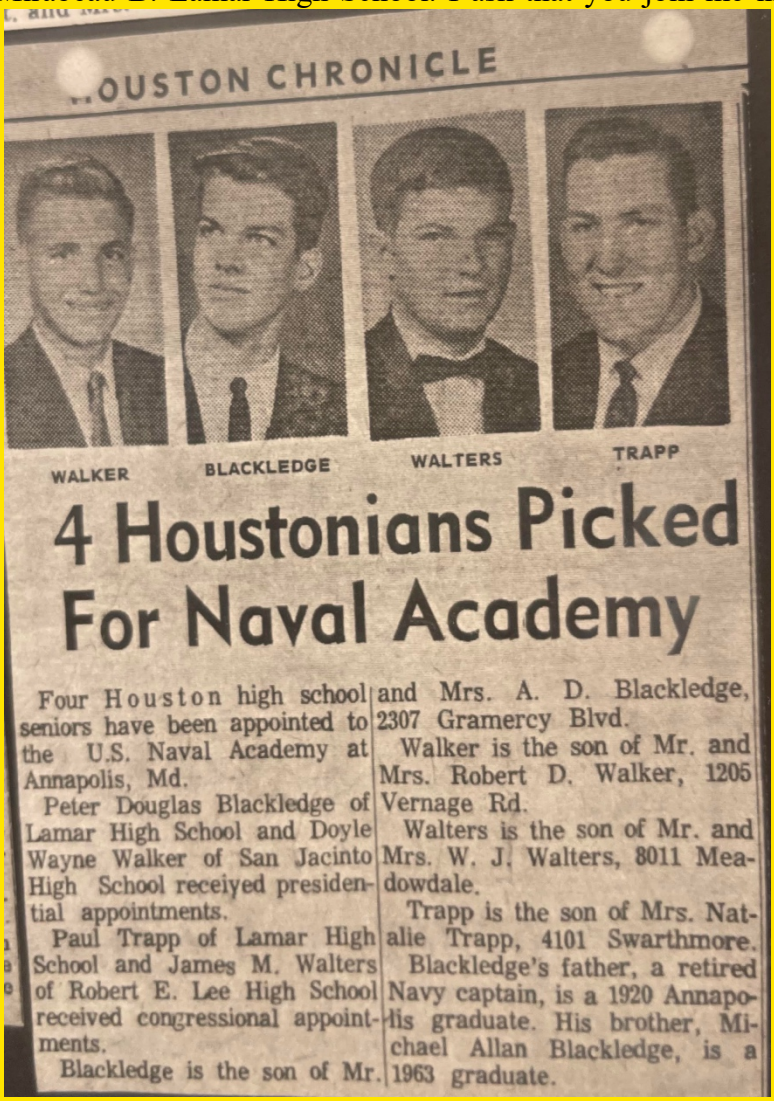
As the evening progressed and spirits rose, so did the inevitable question: "What happens if we put her in the pool?" This was not asked as much as it was collectively realized—like gravity, or destiny. With a ceremonial heave and a great deal of laughter, Polly was launched poolward, where she hit the water with a magnificent splash and bobbed triumphantly to the surface, utterly unbothered.

Her splash was the starting gun. Guests followed her en masse - fully clothed, half-dressed, wildly committed, as if inhabiting the pool scene from the delightful movie "It's A Wonderful Life" - because no one wanted to be the person who didn't jump in after the inflatable guest of honor. By the end of the night, the pool was packed, the party had migrated entirely to the deep end, and

Polly floated among everyone like a cheerful plastic catalyst, grinning as if to say, “You’re welcome. I bring people together.”
As captured in the above photo: When Polly and Peter returned home to Peter’s parent's house, Polly’s pulchritude was compassionately embraced with Latex Love by Peters’ bother Mike’s ex-wife Helen - and the two females celebrated Polly’s triumph at having transcended the sad script of Sandy Posey’s “Born A Woman” to inhabit Nancy Sinatra’s proud anthem “These Boots Are Made For Walking” …… despite Polly being bereft of shoes. As we’ve seen in politics, even Airheads can win.

From Receiving A Standing Ovation To Being Spat On And Being Called "Baby Killer"

In 1964, while I was seated in my Advanced Major Works English class, Dr Harold Costlow - the distinguished Principal of our Lamar High School - suddenly came on the school's loudspeaker. We could viscerally feel all 1,000 Lamar students suddenly straighten in their seats, and the usual murmur of hushed conversations immediately ceased. Everyone knew that our Lamar's Principal very rarely made loudspeaker announcements to Lamar's thousand students, and then only for the most urgent and important matters. I vividly recalls the Principal's message that day: "I have a very important announcement to make. Lamar student Peter Blackledge has been personally nominated by the President of the United States to attend the United States Naval Academy. This is a great honor for Peter, and for Mirabeau B. Lamar High School. I ask that you join me in congratulating Peter for this extraordinary achievement." I was totally shocked as every member of my Advanced Major Works English class suddenly rose from their chairs to give me a standing ovation. I recall feeling stunned as I joyfully, but tearfully, looked around the room at my classmates, whom I knew had been accepted at Harvard, Yale, Rice, Caltech, and M.I.T. I was incredulous at this extraordinary honor by such accomplished classmates, and felt great pride at my not only having patriotically answered President John F. Kennedy's exhortation to serve our country, but also now receiving such a profound display of respect by my cherished Lamar High School classmates.



...OUSTON CHRONICLE

WALKER BLACKLEDGE WALTERS TRAPP

4 Houstonians Picked For Naval Academy

Four Houston high school seniors have been appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md.

Peter Douglas Blackledge of Lamar High School and Doyle Wayne Walker of San Jacinto High School received presidential appointments.

Paul Trapp of Lamar High School and James M. Walters of Robert E. Lee High School received congressional appointments.

Blackledge is the son of Mr. and Mrs. A. D. Blackledge, 2307 Gramercy Blvd.

Walker is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Walker, 1205 Vernage Rd.

Walters is the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Walters, 8011 Meadowdale.

Trapp is the son of Mrs. Natalie Trapp, 4101 Swarthmore.

Blackledge's father, a retired Navy captain, is a 1920 Annapolis graduate. His brother, Michael Allan Blackledge, is a 1963 graduate.

In 1967, I flew home for Christmas, proudly wearing my Naval Academy uniform as I had for the two previous Christmases. As I entered the Houston, Texas airport, something felt very different; I felt as if I had been transported to a parallel universe. The Crew Cuts and Poodle Skirts and Virgin Pins which marked my years growing up in Houston had been replaced with Long Hair and Miniskirts and White Go-Go Boots. When I had worn my uniform home for Christmas in 1965, my entry into the Houston Airport had brought approving looks from Houston's beautiful young women, nods of approval from mothers as they pointed me out to their swooning daughters, and handshakes and slaps on the back from admiring men. Now young women turned away from me, and men gave me menacing stares, and one women angrily walked up and spat on me. As I walked further through the Houston airport terminal, I was surrounded by angry Houstonians on his every side yelling "Baby Killer!!!" I had become a stranger in a strange land, in my own beloved hometown, all for my proudly answering President Kennedy's call to serve my country. "Beach Blanket Bingo" was now "Woodstock". Sandra Dee and Debbie Reynolds had been replaced by Janis Joplin and Grace Slick. **Kennedy was dead, and so was America's Innocence.**

Six decades later, when I established and became the President of a Military Veterans Group at my Montebello condominium complex, I initiated and hosted a special Vietnam Veterans Memorial Service. As part of my opening address to that Veterans Group, I shared my experience of being spat upon in 1967 for wearing my uniform. It was touchingly sad to see the majority of the Veterans Group sadly nod their heads in similar remembrance, and the distinguished retired United States Air Force Colonel, and now Vice President of the Montebello Board Of Directors, noticeably hung his head and plaintively whispered "That happened to me too", and then he broke down weeping over his visceral memory of being spat on for serving his country. Some scars never heal.

USN
EX SCIENTIA TRIDES
HARD TIMES AT
U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY:
The Making Of A Naval Officer

“You Will Be Assimilated; Resistance Is Futile”

Entering the United States Naval Academy was quite a culture shock for Peter. His days were suddenly consumed with Kiwi Shoe Polish and Brasso belt buckle shiner. Now marching with 4300 sweaty guys replaced dancing closely with one beautiful, perfumed Lamar woman; carefree picnics on Lamar’s relaxing front lawn were replaced with “bracing up” at regimented meals where the practice of “two chews and a swallow” was mandated, and casual meal conversations were replaced with forced recitations of required answers to the historic “Reef Point” questions of “How’s The Cow?” and the politically incorrect “How long is the mess hall?” The elegant dinner menus of the exquisite bistros which Peter had shared with his beautiful Lamar dates were now replaced by Peter and his fellow freshmen “Plebes” being forced to stand and yell the menus for each meal to his United States Naval Academy sneering upperclassmen, before frantically running to Brigade formation in order to march into the United States Naval Academy dining hall, where Peter and his Plebe classmates were forced to bear the constant screaming indignities and whims of his United States Naval Academy upperclassmen. A dramatic verse of Scripture reverberated over and over through Peter’s consciousness: “My God, My God. Why has thou forsaken me?……. It is finished.”

They Made You Do What???

I admittedly was incredulous at what Peter's United States Naval Academy Class of 1969 (which I understand was "The Last United States Naval Academy Class To Have A Plebe Year") was subjected to during their Plebe Year. Here are just three of many examples Peter shared with me:

1. Greyhound Races: There are several variations of this, but one was "Jocks, Socks, Boondocks, Carry Lockbox", in which Plebes were stripped down to wearing only their Jockstrap with a second Jockstrap over their mouths to resemble a racing greyhound, supplemented by wearing their heavy issued boondocks shoes, white or black socks, and carrying their haze-gray lockbox. Races up and down the passageways of Bancroft Hall between similarly festooned Plebe classmates would seem to last forever.

2. Hanging Around And Listening To Music Unsuspecting Plebes were asked by scurrilous Upper Classmen if they wanted to hang around and listen to music. Trusting Plebes would gladly accept this offer of respite from Plebe Year travails, only to find that the upperclassman would then require the hapless Plebe to hang upside down from the Upperclassman's shower bar while the Upperclassman enjoyed music.

3. Tea-Fights These were mandatory dances held in the less-than-beautiful ambiance of the Dahlgren Hall armory. A sheet was hung down the center of Dahlgren Hall, with Plebes cloistered onto one side of the sheet and sometimes-desperate local college coeds herded (Peter used that term advisedly) onto the other side. As the queues on each side of the sheet progressed, each trepidatious Plebe when reaching the head of his queue would put out his hand and take the hand of the woman extended from the other side of the sheet, and each Plebe was required to remain with that woman for the entire evening. Plebe urban myths abounded about looking under the sheet and seeing hooves, or having Plebe hands taken by large, meaty, hairy paws.

Channeling Sisyphus:
The Eternal Noble Suffering
Of A Plebe

Written by Plebe Emeritus Peter Blackledge in league with ChatGPT and AI - Neither of whom were ever subjected to the indignities and deprivations of a United States Naval Academy Plebe Year.

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to an eternity of futile labor in Tartarus, where he must endlessly push a giant boulder up a hill, only for it to roll back down just as he nears the summit, forcing him to start over. His punishment symbolizes meaningless, endless tasks, known as a "Sisyphean" labor.

And so it was, is, and eternity shall be for the hapless Freshmen “Plebes” of the United States Naval Academy. I know all too well about that seemingly endless, pointless struggle, for I was one of those condemned to be a Plebe in 1965 as part of The Great Class Of 1969. Our Tartarus was Bancroft Hall.

I arrived at the United States Naval Academy convinced of two things:
1. I was reasonably fit.
2. I was reasonably knowledgeable

Both assumptions were disproven within the first fifteen minutes of Plebe Summer.

My illusion of fitness was shattered by endless hours of pushups, burpees, shoving out, rigging in, and a full panoply of arcane exercises which would have destroyed even Jack LaLanne.

My knowledge base was assailed by an endless torrent of non-intellectual questions which were so fatuous, pointless, and lowbrow that they would make even a Philistine roll his eyes in disgust:
- How’s the cow?
- How long is the mess hall?
- How long have you been in the Navy?
- How many panes of glass are there in the Memorial Hall Ceiling?
- Who was Moaning Maggie?

Our meteorology training was limited to the “How cold is it” answer of “Colder than the knob on an outhouse door; Colder than the heart of a Baltimore whore…….”. The lyrics went even further downhill from there.

Our legal training was limited to “The Laws Of The Siberian Salt Mine”

“What’s up” and “What time is it” took on an entirely new and extended meaning.

No one ever explained why these gems of knowledge were critical to our being an outstanding Naval Officer, but it was often clearly explained to us that not knowing the answers and reciting them perfectly could result in demerits which could prevent our even becoming Naval Officers. We were in a Catch 22, and had clearly passed Through The Looking Glass.

Food, too, became an academic discipline.

At meals, we did not eat - we performed precision refueling operations under fire. Elbows locked. Eyes in the boat. “Two Chews And A Swallow.” Exactly enough to survive, but not so much that it suggested enjoyment. Upperclassmen roamed the tables like maritime predators, ready to pounce on infractions such as “looking up” or “appearing nourished.”

Food was a privilege. Salt was contraband. Pepper was mythological.

Sleep, meanwhile, was something other people enjoyed. Civilians. Weaklings. Children. Politicians.

A Plebe learns to sleep standing up, leaning against bulkheads, or briefly between heartbeats. We could fall asleep during formation and awaken instantly when someone shouted our name or suddenly appeared menacingly in our face.

And then there was knowledge.

A Plebe’s brain becomes a floating library of arcane naval history, football statistics, chain-of-command details, and facts no one outside Bancroft Hall will ever request or care about.

“Plebe, who was the 17th Secretary of the Navy?”

I didn’t know who he was, but I knew his birthday, favorite ship, and shoe size.

The physical training was relentless. Running everywhere. Pushups everywhere. Sweat everywhere. The human body, I learned, contains fluids I had never met before.

Yet – somehow - between the chaos, the yelling, the marching, and the existential exhaustion, something strange happened.

We bonded.

Plebes became brothers in shared misery. We learned to laugh quietly, efficiently, and only when no one was watching. We helped each other survive inspections, memorize rates, locate missing covers at critical moments, and “Pick Up The Blue.”

And one day, almost without noticing, we stood a little straighter; moved a little faster; knew we belonged.

Plebe Year never got easy - but *we* got better.

And years later, when someone asks me about my time as a Plebe, I smile. Somewhat painfully, but I smile, nonetheless.

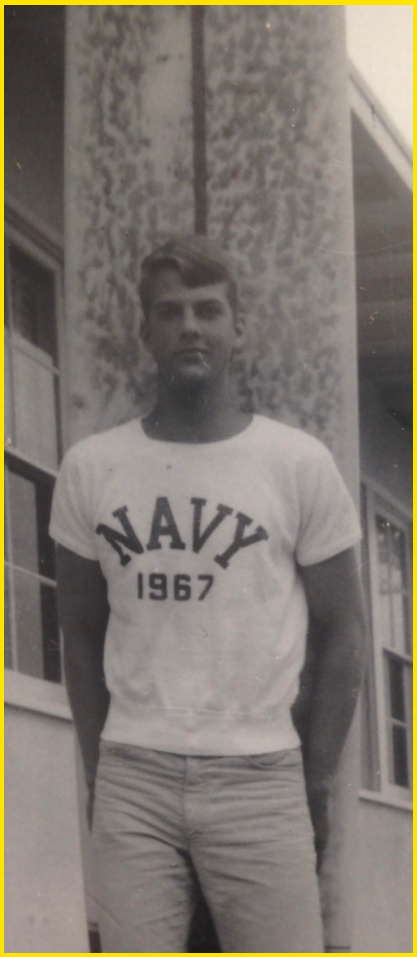
Because nothing forges pride quite like being yelled at for walking incorrectly…
…by someone who was once yelled at for the exact same thing.

California Dreamin':
Happiness Comes In Waves

In the Summer of 1966, I was offered a sliver of normality via some vacation time after my freshman "Plebe" year at the United States Naval Academy. At Lamar High School, my favorite music group had been "The Beach Boys", and I had often dreamed of a "Surfin' Safari" to the "Beach Blanket Bingo" magic land of "Two Girls For Every Boy" California. Armed with this vision, my adventurous spirit activated. I found that through a series of free "hops" on military aircraft, I could travel from Annapolis, Maryland, to Long Beach, California, at no cost - which precisely fit my budget. So I went for it.

Arriving in California, I had enthusiastically traded my spit-shined black uniform shoes for some gnarly tire-tread surfer huaraches, and my M1 rifle for a surfboard. I was in Surfin Heaven.

Although my attempts at surfing were more of a "wipeout", and my visions of having Annette Funicello hanging on my arm while "Little Surfer Girls" frolicked in the waves around me didn't happen, I rapturously devoured every morsel of freedom like a starving refugee.



Plebe Year In 1916
For
United States Naval Academy
Class Of 1920

In approximately 500 BC, the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus famously asserted “The only constant in life is change.” Obviously, Heraclitus never had a Plebe Year at the United States Naval

Academy. If he had, Heraclitus would have been aware of one certain fact - which my Father and I share with other United States Naval Academy Midshipman: That the appalling treatment of Plebes by Upperclassmen at the United States Naval Academy has not changed - at least from my Father's United States Naval Academy Class of 1920 to my United States Naval Academy Class of 1969. I will provide two examples of said immutable and enduring treatment which my Father shared with me from his Plebe year.

(1) In my father's class, the upperclassmen delighted in subjecting their Plebes to a tortuous practice called "The Dreaded Thermocouple". If Dick Cheney had known about this practice, he would have included it in the Enhanced Interrogation Waterboarding of terrorists Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, Abu Zubaydah, and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri - and thereby forced a much quicker divulgement of valuable intelligence. "The Dreaded Thermocouple" involved several upperclassmen summarily flipping a Plebe upside down. Then, while the Plebe is being held teetering on his head, simultaneously pouring freezing ice water down one leg, and pouring scalding hot water down the other leg. It is said that when these two diametrically opposed forces met at "Genital Junction", the Plebe would let out an excruciating screech which could heard all the way to West Point.

(2) Plebes in the Class Of 1920 virtually marched through history, not only marching in Woodrow Wilson's Second Inaugural Parade, but also in the Funeral of Admiral Dewey - the only person in U. S. history to have attained the rank of Admiral of the Navy. Before President Wilson's parade started, my Dad requested from his Platoon Leader permission to use the restroom ..... only to have his Platoon Leader growl back at him "What do you think your leggings are for, Mister?!!"

Some of my Naval Academy Class Of 1969 classmates might say "But Pete, the Class Of 1920 suffered through World War I AND the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic which killed 675,000 Americans. Two major catastrophes. How can we possibly relate to that?" I would remind my Classmates that our Class Of 1969 ALSO suffered through two major catastrophes: We TWICE lost the Army-Navy Game!

To honor his United States Naval Academy Class Of 1969 on the 55th Anniversary of their graduation, Peter reached out to ask his classmates to send him their favorite photos of the USNA'69 Glory Years. The following are the 134 photos submitted to Peter by his USNA'69 Classmates, which Peter then also incorporated into a video on which he played "Navy Blue And Gold" in the background. Video link is provided at the end of this photo gallery.

Recalling The Fabled
1965-1969 "Glory Years"
Of "The Great U.S. Naval Academy
Class of 1969"

They Were "Our Best Of Years";
They Were "Our Worst Of Years."
But they were uniquely <u>Our Years</u>
which created for us an enduring,
unbreakable bond of brothers.

Authored by:

PETER D. BLACKLEDGE
UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY
CLASS OF 1969

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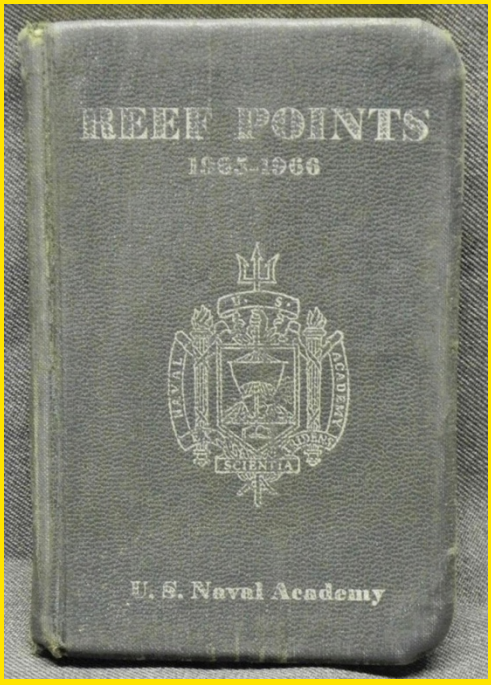
LONGTALLTEXAN@ICLOUD.COM
703-915-4046


REEF POINTS
1965-1966
U. S. Naval Academy

KIWI
SHOE
POLISH
BLACK
NET WT. 3 OZ.

Hell

She walks, she talks,
she full of chalk...

United States
Naval Academy
Midshipmen's
Wardroom
BEAT ARMY
HOMOGENIZED
2% MILK

Spiffy
COLLAR
"STAY-DOWN"
INVISIBLE
• holds collar points down
PREVENTS RUMPLED COLLARS
STOPS COLLAR CURL
KEEPS TIE UP
SAVES LAUNDERING
SELF-ADJUSTING
FITS ALL COLLARS
INVISIBLE-WORN UNDER COLLAR
ON-AND-OFF IN A JIFFY

BRASSO

Back Row: P. D. Blackledge, E. B. Wild, R. C. Klosterman, B. E. Woodruff, III, T. J. Wandishin, P. M. Settle, R. C. Spolini, G. J. Buchert, Jr., J. D. Morgan. *Third Row:* P. F. Connors, L. F. Rubano, P. C. Lame, R. P. Vehorn, R. O. Cassada, D. K. Dag-

Second Row: R. L. Hutchings, J. M. Bunker, W. D. Morton, J. L. Klokow, R. D. Mullins, R. C. Eikenberry, R. F. Stoss, J. M. Kelly. *Front Row:* J. S. Brown, B. B. Stahl, M. A. Fisher, R. J. Fawcett, M. W. Mauss, D. H. Tanaka

USNA
69
USNA
69

Dottie Pomeroy, 20, is a junior at Edinbord State Teachers College.
U. of Texas is blessed with pretty Pam Haynes.
Lovely Miss Melissa Lewis, 19, tends Randolph Macon Woma College.
22nd COMPANY CUTIES
A freshman at Cornell U. is Jeanine Jurzenia, 18.
From Stockton, Calif. and the U. of the Pacific comes Francine Coane.
Miss Dorothy Sheridan, 17, hails from Princeton, Ind.
The LOG • November 18, 1966 / Page 22

LIQUORS

22
47
11
37
12
16
42
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56
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34
69
41

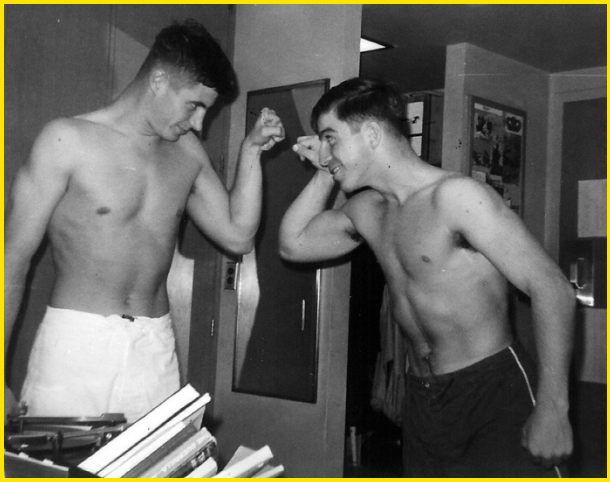
July 6/1964

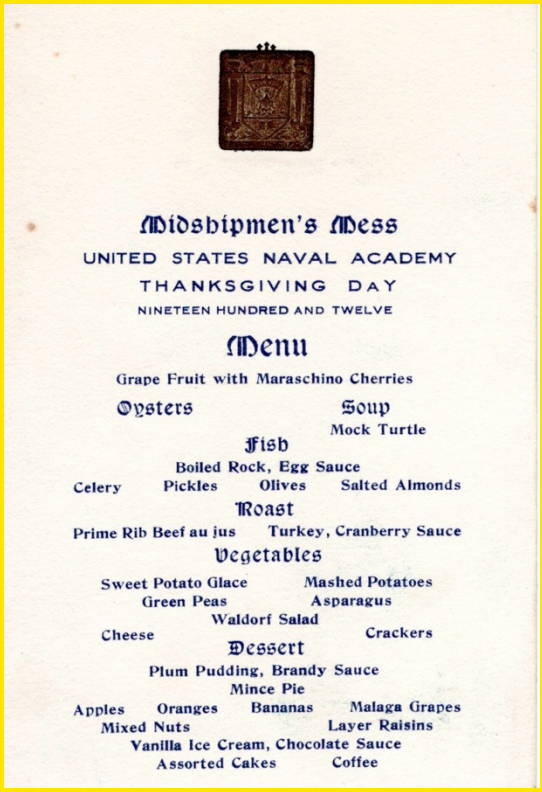
Midshipman John D. Morgan has reported abroad the Guided Missile Frigate USS LEAHY (DLG-16) for the Summer Midshipman Training Cruise. The LEAHY "First of the Double Enders," carries Terrier Missile launchers both forward and aft.

From Annapolis, Maryland where the Midshipmen came aboard, LEAHY proceeded to New York, N. Y. for a three day visit. After a short visit to her homeport, Charleston, S. C. LEAHY headed for the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Range north of Puerto Rico for operations with the Blue Task Group of the U. S. Second Fleet. Training highlights will include mutiple ship missile firings and Anti-submarine Warfare drills.

Upon completion of operations LEAHY will proceed to Miami, Florida to celebrate the Fourth of July.

While on board Midshipman Morgan will receive practical instruction in Operations, Engineering, Weapons, and Navigation. He will be integrated into the ships company and, in addition to meeting his training requirements, contribute to the performance of LEAHY.





Midshipmen's Mess

UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

THANKSGIVING DAY

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE

Menu

Grape Fruit with Maraschino Cherries

Oysters

Soup

Mock Turtle

Fish

Boiled Rock, Egg Sauce

Celery Pickles Olives Salted Almonds

Roast

Prime Rib Beef au jus Turkey, Cranberry Sauce

Vegetables

Sweet Potato Glace Mashed Potatoes

Green Peas Asparagus

Waldorf Salad

Cheese Crackers

Dessert

Plum Pudding, Brandy Sauce

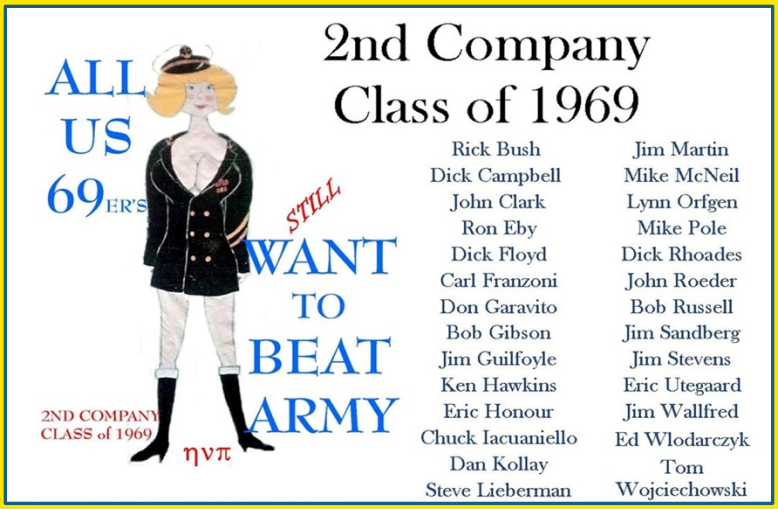
Mince Pie

Apples Oranges Bananas Malaga Grapes

Mixed Nuts Layer Raisins

Vanilla Ice Cream, Chocolate Sauce

Assorted Cakes Coffee


ALL US 69ER'S
STILL WANT TO BEAT ARMY
2ND COMPANY CLASS of 1969
ηνπ
2nd Company
Class of 1969
Rick Bush
Dick Campbell
John Clark
Ron Eby
Dick Floyd
Carl Franzoni
Don Garavito
Bob Gibson
Jim Guilfoyle
Ken Hawkins
Eric Honour
Chuck Iacuaniello
Dan Kollay
Steve Lieberman
Jim Martin
Mike McNeil
Lynn Orfgen
Mike Pole
Dick Rhoades
John Roeder
Bob Russell
Jim Sandberg
Jim Stevens
Eric Utegaard
Jim Wallfred
Ed Wlodarczyk
Tom Wojciechowski

'I have not
yet begun
to fight'

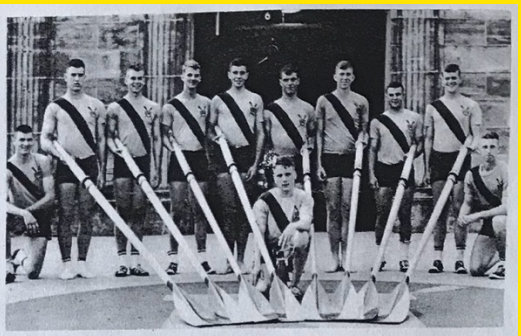
CREW

☆

FRESHMAN

Pos.	Name	Age	Ht.	Wt.	Home Town
Bow	Dempsey, Richard M.	18	6:4	185	Arlington, Va.
2	Renfree, Peter R.	19	6:3	190	New Bedford, Conn.
3	Hannemann, James	18	6:5	190	Eagle, Wisc.
4	Gembol, Michael P.	18	6:3	195	Columbus, Neb.
5	Barausky, James E.	19	6:5	200	Pawling, N. Y.
6	Blackledge, Peter D.	18	6:4	181	Houston, Tex.
7	Kolstad, Charles F.	18	6:3	182	Bakersfield, Calif.
Str.	Burbage, Charles T.	20	6:4	200	McLean, Va.
Average			6:4	190	
Cox.	Craft, James P. III	18	5:7	130	Philadelphia, Pa.
Subs.	Simmons, Eric C.	18	5:9	163	Arlington, Va.
	Brixey, Stephen A.	18	6:2	195	McMinnville, Ore.

Coach: Louis W. Gellermann



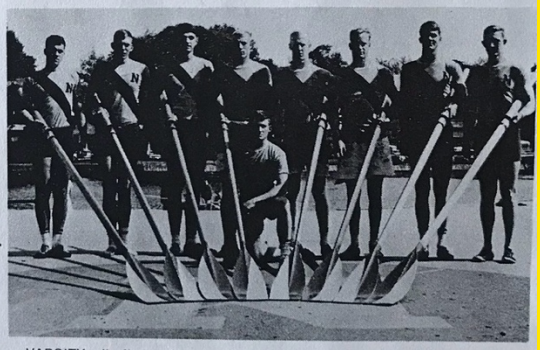
FRESHMAN—(left to right): Robert James, Charles Burbage, Charles Kolstad, Peter Blackledge, James Barausky, Michael Gembol, Richard Dempsey, Eric Simmons, Stephen Brixey, Peter Renfree. Kneeling in front: James Craft.

NAVY

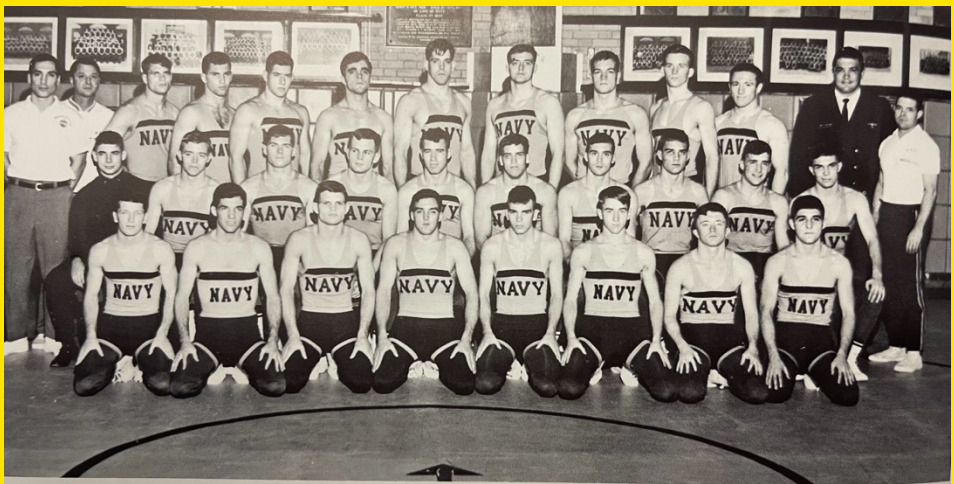
VARSITY

Pos.	Name	Class	Age	Ht.	Wt.	Home Town
Bow	Denson, David	'68	24	6:4	190	Roanoke, Va.
2	Mackenzie, Tom	'70	19	6:4	190	Baltimore, Md.
3	Hannemann, Jim	'69	20	6:5	190	Eagle, Wis.
4	Rowley, Dennis	'68	23	6:4	210	Walnut Creek, Cal.
5	Miller, Stuart	'70	19	6:4	205	Huron, Ohio
6	Blackledge, Peter	'69	20	6:4	190	Houston, Tex.
7	Dempsey, Rich.	'69	20	6:4	190	San Antonio, Tex.
Str.	Saltenberger, Wm.	'70	20	6:2	190	Medford Lakes, N.J.
Average				6:4	192	
Cox.	Prince, Robert	'70	20	5:4	120	Ithaca, N.Y.
Subs.	Hess, Mike	'69	20	6:3	190	Newton, Mass.
	Elliott, Charles	'70	21	6:4	195	Kansas City, Mo.

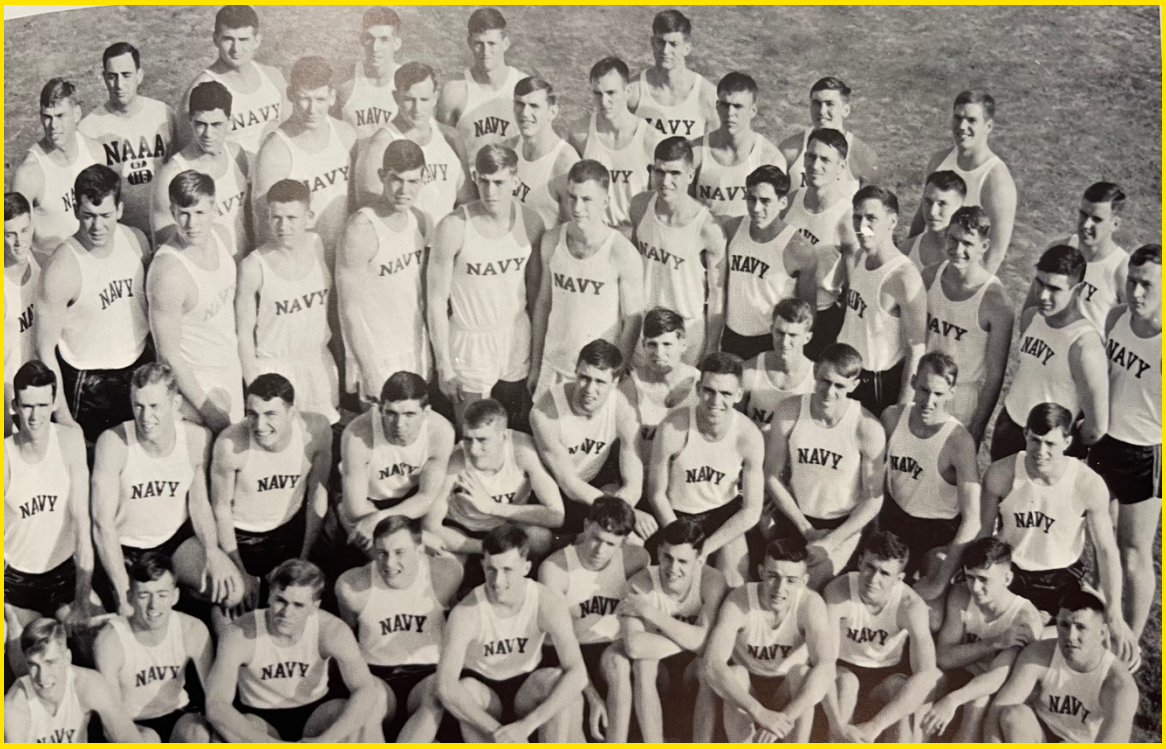
Coach: Louis W. Gellermann Manager: D. P. Russell



VARSITY—(Left to Right): Bill Saltenberger, Rich Dempsey, John Collins, Stu Miller, Mike Malone, Mike Hess, Pete Blackledge, Jim Schwenk, (Kneeling): Bob Prince.



st Row (left to right): Joseph Henry, Philip Conti, Dale Stahl, Team Captain Steve Comiskey, Lew Mason, Frank Culbertson, Terry Foust, Jim Gonzalos. **cond Row:** John Snakenberg (Manager), Larry Cochran, Mike Michaelis, Robert Christainson, John Nevins, Bill Smith, Mike Carmichael, Wilson Fritchman, hn Sattler, Carl Bauer. **Third Row:** Plebe Coach Robert Kopniskey, Al McFadden (Trainer), Robert Ahrens, Ed Bannat, Mike Kehoe, Ben Welch, Mark Kane, vid Vaderels, Chris Funke, Rich Thomas, Greg Koons, Officer Representative LCDR. Peter S. Blair, Coach Ed Peery.


NAAA
NAVY

POLE
2

NAVY

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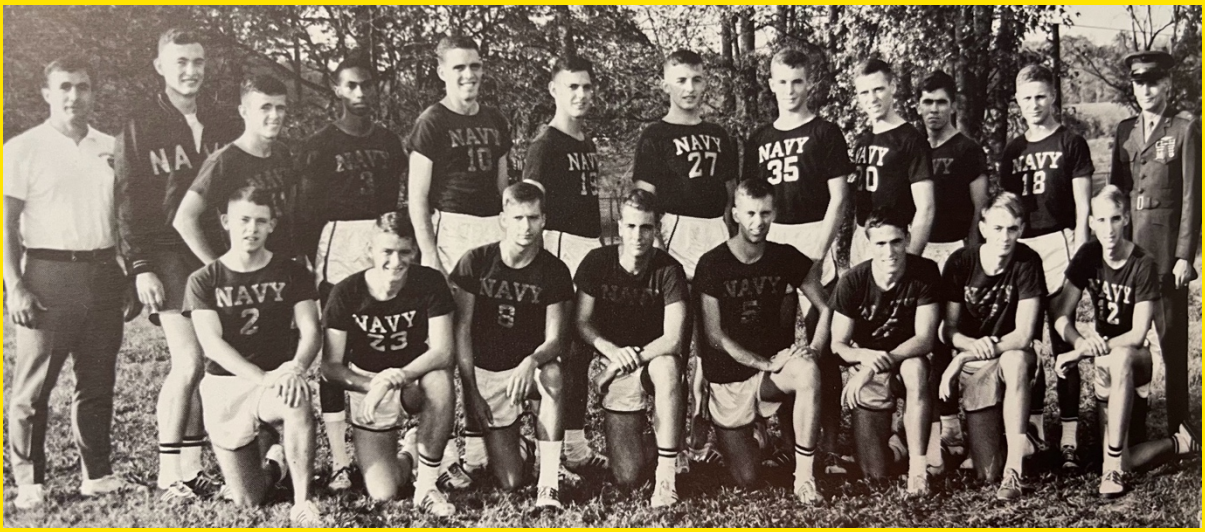
30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NAVY
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NAVY
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NAVY
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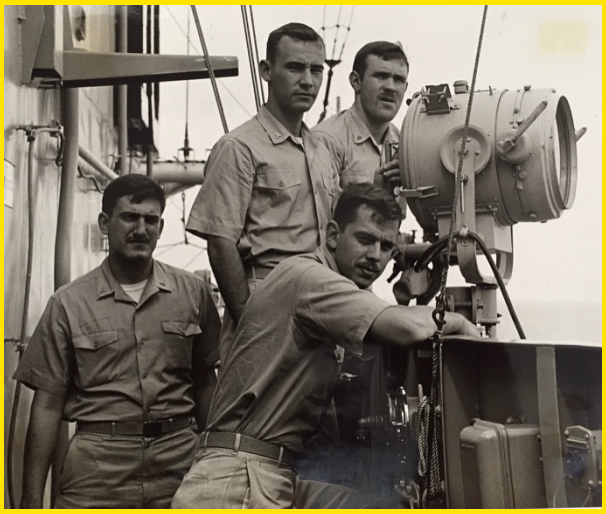
NAVY
18

THE
TOMBS

ANNAPO
7 MILE
ST. JOHN'S CO
ΣΑΕ

NAVY SUPER STUD
NAVY
KNIFE
BEAT ARMY
BLAST ARMY
THE KNIGHTS

NAVY SWIM TEAM

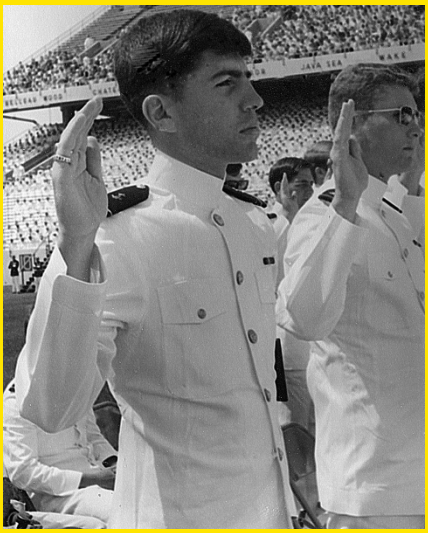


16

Peter
the greatest
Julie Newmar

THE
SPIFFYS
68
THE U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY

1969
ACHENBACH, P. L. JR.
AHRENS, R. A.
ALFIERI, P. A.
ALLISON, H. K.
ARNOLD, R. G.
ATTURIO, J. M.
BAILEY, R. A.
BALSLY, J. D.
BANNAT, E. G.
BARAUSKY, J. E.
BARRETT, F. O. III
BARTLETT, R. J.
BATTEN, H. N. JR.
BLACKLEDGE, P. D.
BLAUE, J. W.
BODINE, J. H.
BOUCHER, O. A. JR.
BOUDREAUX, J. C. III
BOWEN, J. C.
BRIXLEY, S. A.
BROBECK, G. W.
BRYANT, S. W.
BUNKER, J. M.
BURBAGE, C. T.
BURKE, D. P.
BUTTRILL, W. S.
CARMICHAEL, H. M. JR.
CARR, E. F.
CARVER, B. W.
CAVANAUGH, T. J.
CLARK, M. B.
CLEVERDON, T. F.
COLIN, D. F.
COLLINS, J. P.
COMISKEY, S. W.
CONGER, R. W. JR.
CONRAD, J. W.
CONTI, P. O.
COWIN, R. W.
CRAFT, J. P. III
CRISP, D. W.
CRISP, M. H.
CUCCIAS, R. F. JR.
DALEY, T. J.
DAVIDSON, J. A.
DEEN, J. W.
DEMPSEY, R. M.
DEPP, N. R.
DUNHAM, G. R.
EBY, R. G.
EDGAR, J. K.
EDMONDS, C. H.
ENGLER, B. D.
ESTEY, D. H. JR.
EVERETT, J. C.
FAHY, T. E.
FENDER, R. G.
FORTINO, A. M.
FULBRIGHT, J. J. JR.
GALLAGHER, G. L.
GANTLEY, J. E.
GASS, J. E. JR.
GEMBOL, M. P.
GIBSON, R. S.
GIERUCKI, J. T.
GILLASPIE, R. C.
GILLESPIE, T. R. II
HAGAN, T. F.
HANNEMANN, J. R.
HARVEY, S. A.
HARBIN, M. A.
HARTER, M. P.
HEARNE, L. P.
HESS, M. D.
HILBURN, J. E.
HOGAN, W. A.
HUDOCK, S. A.
HUNT, C. L.
JOHNESEE, J. A.
JOHNSON, C. C.
JOHNSON, G. R. JR.
JOHNSON, S. D.
JONES, M. A. JR.
JONES, M. K.
JOSLIN, R. D.
KANE, J. D. M. III
KELLEY, J. B.
KENNEY, J. M.
KLOSTERMAN, R. C.
KRAL, T. C.
LA FORCE, T. W.
LAHREN, J. W.
LANE, A. L.
LARSEN, S. H.
LAURENZO, R. D.
LEAMAN, S. J.
LETTIERI, M. F.
LILLY, C. D. JR.
LONG, J. E. II
LONG, R. W.
MALONE, M. J.
MANSFIELD, R. D.
MARTIN, R. W.
MATHER, G. W.
Mc CAULEY, W. P.
Mc KEON, T. J.
Mc NEIL, O. N. JR.
MEDFORD, W. R.
MILCHANOWSKI, M. J.
MILES, J. T.
MILLER, J. R.
MOELLER, R. L. JR.
MOORE, M. D.
MORTON, W. D. II
MOSELEY, R. P.
MULLINS, A. F. JR.
MURZINSKI, E. J.
NASTRO, T. R.
NAYLON, P. R.
NEWTON, J. W.
NEWTON, W. H. III
O'BRIEN, J. M.
O'NEILL, H. J.
PAGE, N. M.
PADDOCK, J. R.
PADGETT, J. B. III
PARSONS, D. W.
PATTISON, J. W.
PHILLIPS, R. W. JR.
POIRIER, W. P.
POTTER, M. B.
POTTS, E. S.
PROSSER, D. L.
PROVINI, C. R.
QUANDEL, C. H.
RACHMIEL, M. E.
RACHOR, R. L. JR.
REAGHARD, J. A.
RED, R. P.
REEDY, R. E.
REID, R. G. JR.
RISHEL, M. P.
ROCK, L. G.
RUSH, C. R.
RUSSELL, D. P. III
SADLER, G. R.
SCHARNUS, R. M.
SCIBA, W. L. JR.
SEDGLEY, R. M.
SIMMONS, E. C.
SNAKENBERG, J. D.
STENSTROM, R. E.
STOCKDALE, J. J.
STOPYRA, E. T.
STROMBERG, R. M.
SWANSON, M. T.
TAIT, W. A.
TIERNEY, D. C.
TOLHURST, R. A. JR.
TOLMIE, J. S. JR.
TURK, K. M.
UTEGAARD, T. E.
WALTERS, J. M.
WANNER, T. S.
WARD, J. G.
WEATHERS, W. R. JR.
WELLINGTON, J. A.
WILKES, T. J. JR.
WILLIS, R. L. JR.
WILSON, S. E. III
WITOWSKI, E. T.
WLODARCZYK, E.
WORLEY, M. J.
YATRAS, D. A.



UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY CLASS OF 1969
NON SIBI
19
69
USNA
NON SIBI, SED PATRIAE

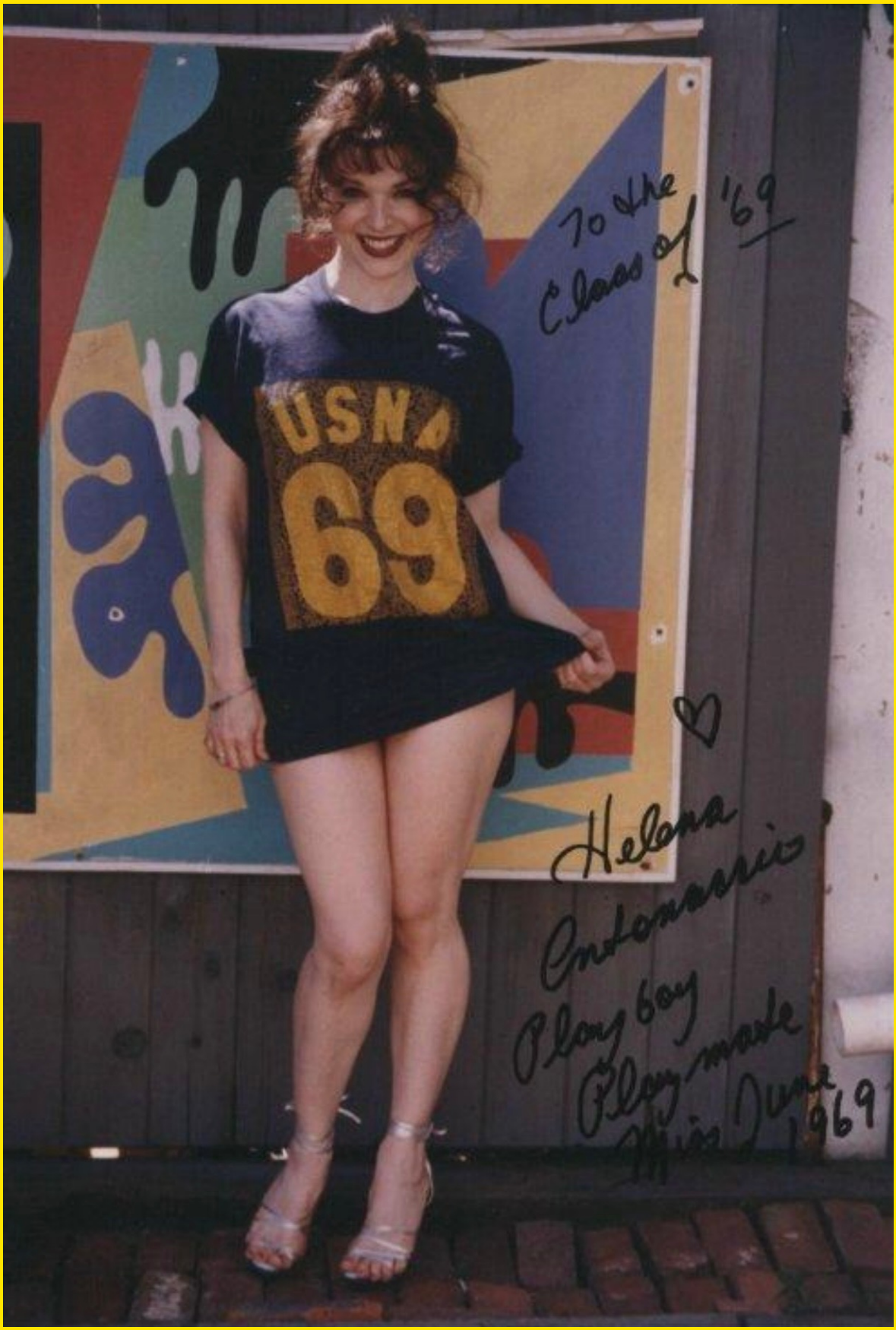
HONORING
THE USNA 1967 2V8 IRA
NATIONAL CHAMPION TEAM
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
(Sports Illustrated)
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
Spoils enroute to Crabtown lockers.
Navy coxswain heads for watery ceremonial.
USNA Navy Crew Honor: On 17 June 1967, in front of 15,000 crew fans, the 1967 USNA 2V8 dramatically & decisively won its IRA Regatta of 14 top rowing colleges— beating nearest competitor Penn by a full two lengths, and having even more open water on Wisconsin, Cornell, Washington, Syracuse, California, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Princeton, UCLA, Brown, Northeastern, and Stanford—bringing the Kennedy Challenge Trophy back to USNA for the fifth time in history. (Intercollegiate Rowing Association and Syracuse Herald-American)
Penn's sweep of Regatta spoiled by Navy
(Peter Douglas Blackledge)
(The New York Times, Syracuse Herald-American)
(Peter Douglas Blackledge)

Philo Norton McGiffin

ARMY

BATTER
THE
BLACK

TRAP
2 0
HE KAYDETS


To the
Class of '69
USNA
69
Helena
Centomani
Playboy
Playmate
Miss June
1969

Lest we forget the most important fundamentals of erudition and wisdom with which we were enlightened during our four years of intensive academic training .....

Which are indelibly seared into our collective consciousness

Yes, sir.

No, sir.

No excuse, sir.

I'll find out, sir.

Aye Aye, sir.

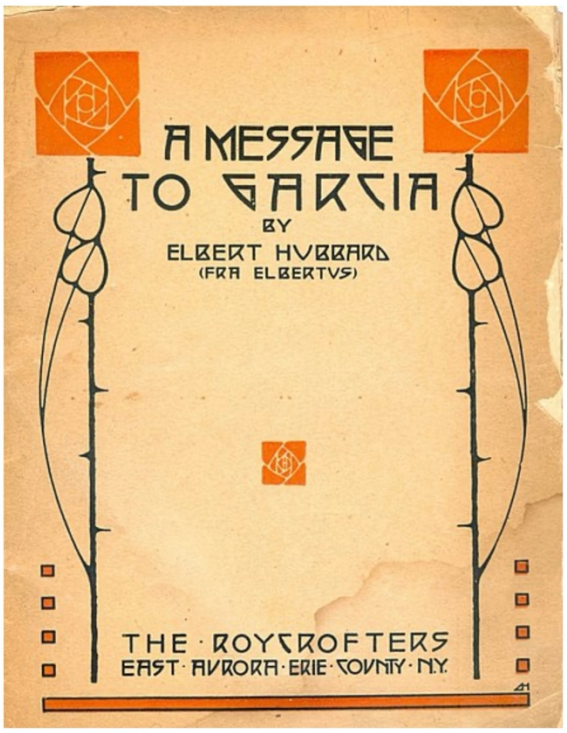
What's Up?

Fidelity is up and Obedience is down on our bayonet buckles, Sir.

How Long Have You Been in the Navy?

All me bloomin' life, sir! Me mother was a mermaid, me father was King Neptune. I was born on the crest of wave and rocked in the cradle of the deep. Seaweed and barnacles are me clothes. Every tooth in me head is a marlinspike; the hair on me head is hemp. Every bone in me body is a spar, and when I spits, I spits tar. I'se hard. Tis, I am, I are!

A Message to Garcia

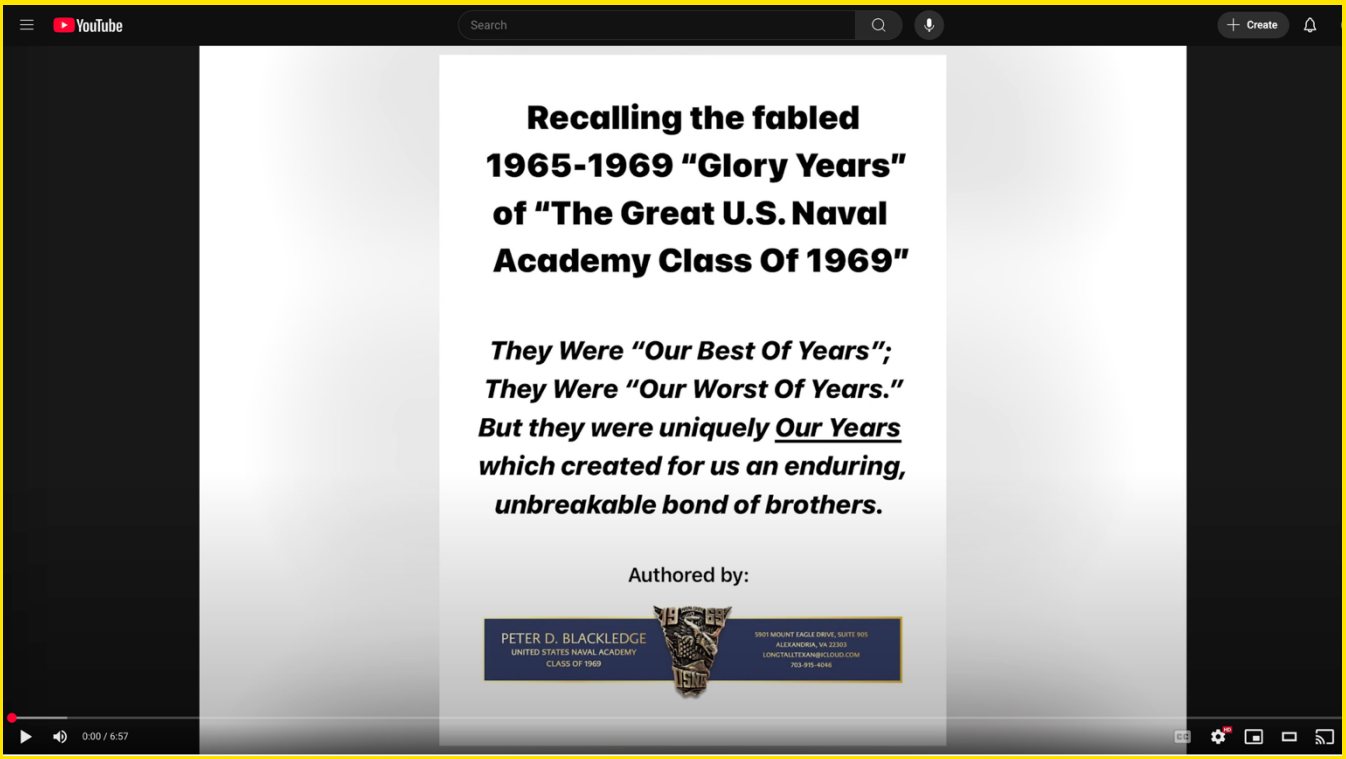


How's the cow?

Sir, she walkes, she talks, she's full of chalk. The lacteal fluid extracted from the female of the bovine species is highly prolific to the (approx number of milk glasses remaining in carton) nth degree!

Watch the “Glory Years of The Great U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1969” video here:

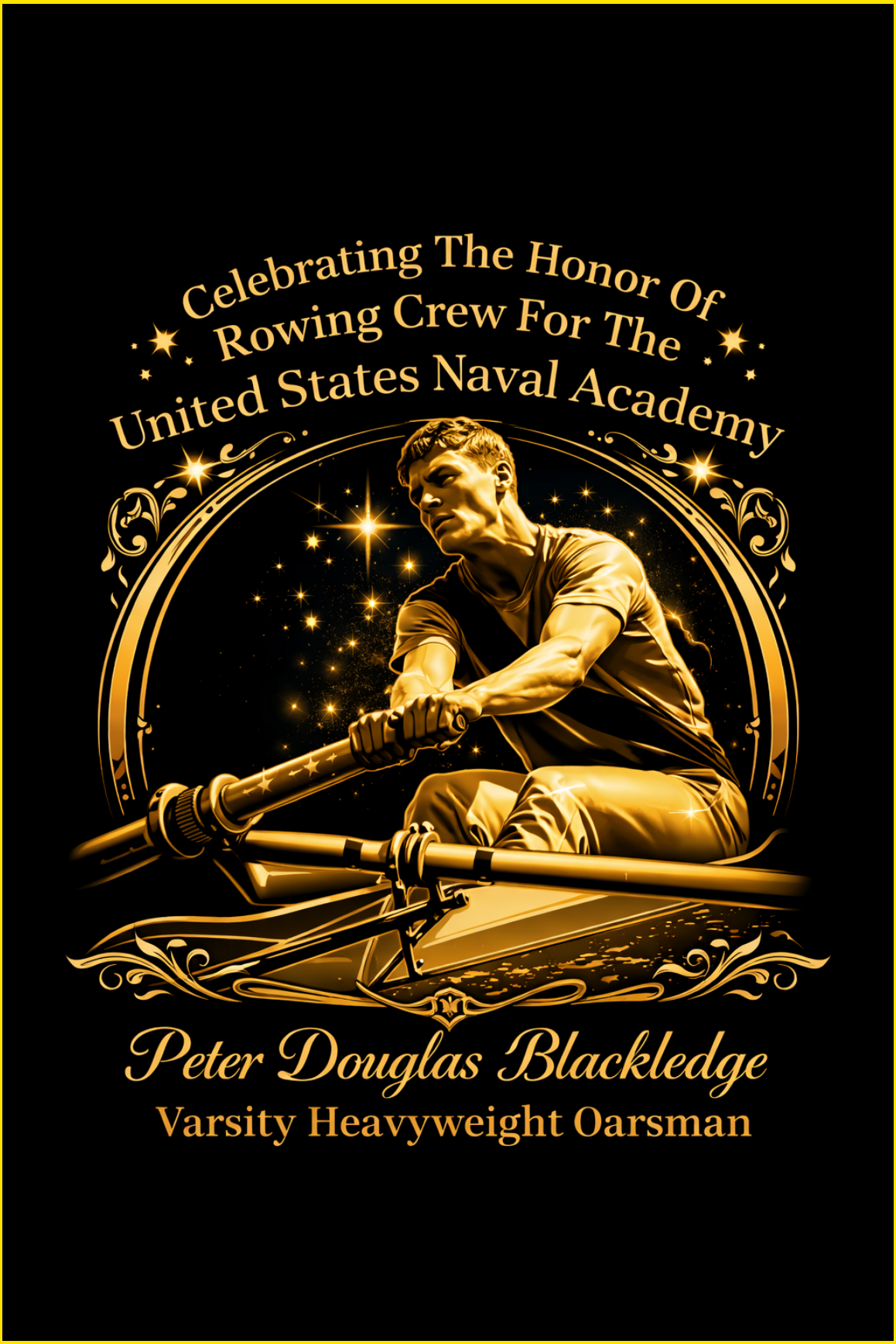
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED1ldZKe20A


YouTube
Search
Create
Recalling the fabled 1965-1969 “Glory Years” of “The Great U.S. Naval Academy Class Of 1969”
They Were “Our Best Of Years”;
They Were “Our Worst Of Years.”
But they were uniquely Our Years
which created for us an enduring, unbreakable bond of brothers.
Authored by:
PETER D. BLACKLEDGE
UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY
CLASS OF 1969
0:00 / 6:57

Those who are able to endure four years of such arduous rigors, forging one more indestructible link in the unbroken chain established in 1845, these are truly MEN, as honored in this classic television show and theme song:

https://youtu.be/AP0hOyMZAYE

ASCENSION TO THE REVERED
U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY
CHAMPIONSHIP ROWING TRADITION
Peter Becomes A Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman
And A Rowing National Champion
N
NAVY


Celebrating The Honor Of
Rowing Crew For The
United States Naval Academy
Peter Douglas Blackledge
Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman

Severn River Echoes:
USNA Rowing Memories
From The Days Of Wooden
Shells & Iron Oarsmen

While preparing my Keynote Speaker remarks for the Naval Academy's 2019 Dedication-Christening-Launching of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell, I thought it would be fun to include some classic memories of rowing from the 1960-1972 "Days Of Wooden Shells And Iron Oarsmen." Unfortunately, I'm so old that my memories are in black and white; but some of my teammates' memories were quite colorful:

• '60 Olympic Oarsman Lyman Perry recalls that if an Oarsman wasn't pulling hard enough, legendary Coach Rusty Callow would yell at him: "Mister, you couldn't pull a sailor off your sister."

• '69 Oarsman Pete Renfree recalls fellow Oarsman Charlie Nation keeping everyone falling over their oars laughing, by loudly reciting full pages of steamy passages from X-Rated novels.

• '69 Coxswain Bill Hogan recalls nervously asking our Plebe coach Lou Gellermann if he had any advice before Bill's first big race. Coach Gellermann responded: "Yeah, don't hit the bridge or any of the other Racing Shells."

• ‘69 Oarsman Steve Brixey confided to me that after over 50 years, he is still plagued by his memory of our first Plebe race against Harvard & Penn - in which we were substantially leading both of those very strong teams, when Steve’s oar got caught in the water, causing us to lose that race. Brix, I was in that Racing Shell with you - and after half a century, I am fully ready to forgive you for causing our Plebe First Boat to lose that important race. Unfortunately, hard-asses Jim Hannemann and Rick Dempsey were also in that Racing Shell, and they are not as forgiving. So, if I were you, I would continue checking under your car before turning on your ignition.

• ‘69 Oarsman Jim Barausky emailed me all the way from his current home in the Andes mountains of Ecuador to recall our racing shell breaking into pieces as we attempted to row through violently choppy waters, saying his resultant hypothermia from extended immersion in freezing water was his closest brush ever with death.

• ‘70 Coxswain John Nute vividly recalls looking up and seeing Coach Gellermann perched atop a bridge for one of his “Gut Checks”, then yelling “Airborne”, and hurling himself off the bridge and into the canal waters below - landing between the dying carp and the astonished water skiers. I’m not aware of any subsequent USNA Varsity Heavyweight Coaches continuing that tradition.

• Everyone remembered “The Terror Of The Tongue Depressors”, in which an Oarsman with the flick of the Couches’ wrist could, sadly, instantly drop from First Boat to Fourth Boat. ‘67 Oarsman Tom Knudsen and ‘69 Oarsman Rick Dempsey each recalled sadly the entire Varsity and Junior Varsity boats being flipped in 1967 and again in 1969.

• ‘71 Oarsman Lou Vest recounts that at the end of long grueling crew practices, with hopes of rowing gently back to the comfort of Mother Hubbard, he inevitably would watch with exhausted dread as Coach Ullrich would rise from his Coach’s boat, like a frightening horned apparition in a Wagnerian Opera, raise his Coach’s megaphone to his lips, and boom out these chilling, feared six words: “"AND NOW, FOR DESSER-TAH, THE SEAWALL!" - challenging his weary Oarsmen, who thought they had nothing left to give, who felt they had left it all on the water - to dig even deeper, to find that final, ultimate effort that even they didn’t know was there - to make that final rowing sprint down what seemed now to be an interminably long Seawall. That extra effort by the ‘71 Crew, and that superb leadership by Coach Ullrich to help them find their greatness, is what made the extraordinary ‘71 team into EARC Champions - upsetting the vaulted Pennsylvania and unbeaten Harvard Varsity Heavyweight Teams to win the EARC for the first time in decades - AND to become both VFW IRA National Champions AND 2V8 IRA National Champions.

•‘60 Oarsman Peter Bos, who was Captain of the legendary USNA 1960 Olympic Team, described to me that at the end of each crew practice under iconic USNA Crew Coach Rusty Callow, the ‘60 Oarsmen were so exhausted they would literally have to CRAWL out of their Racing Shells. As with the ‘71 team, that extra effort is what made the ‘60 Crew into Olympians.

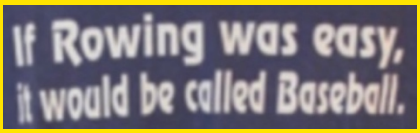
• Multiple Oarsmen vividly recalled - as certainly do I - when we intensely-driven ‘68/‘69/‘70 Varsity Heavyweight Oarsmen were literally “going the extra mile”: Dragging our rowing-exhausted bodies out of bed each morning at 3am to run countless Rotunda steps behind our ‘68 Varsity Heavyweight Crew Captain Denny Rowley, followed by intense afternoon practices of

long hard rows, endless miles of street runs, and then 68 sets of Navy-Marine Corps stadium steps - all under Coach Gellermann's plan to seriously toughen us up for his vision of our competing in the '68 Olympics. Yep, we definitely got tough, but many of my fellow 1968 Varsity Heavyweight Oarsmen felt our being so grossly overtrained off the water actually made slower on the water. At least we have Tales Of Toughness to share with grandchildren!!!

But we all loved Coach Gellerman. He was great; unforgettable; never a dull moment. Adding to Coxswain John Nute's above memory of Coach Gellerman hurling himself Airborne off a bridge: My most stirring memory of Coach Gellerman was when I was rowing by myself in the tank when Coach Gellerman came into the tank room leading a group of wide-eyed new Plebe oarsmen. As background: A few months earlier, at the 1967 Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships, my boat's dramatic upset win of the 2V8 IRA Championships had amazingly kicked the Varsity IRA race off all the front pages, becoming the lead story in all the newspapers and IRA Press Releases - and we even had our photos taken by *Sports Illustrated* Magazine - because we had so decisively crushed the very strong and highly favored University of Pennsylvania crew and the rest of the field (as the IRA Press Releases and the *New York Times* and *Syracuse Herald-American* front page sports story wrote: "Navy beat nearest competitor Penn by more than two full lengths, with even more open water on Wisconsin, Cornell, Washington, Syracuse, California, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Princeton, UCLA, Brown, Northeastern, and Stanford - thereby bringing the Kennedy Challenge Trophy back to USNA for the fifth time in history." Their race photo with those front page stories showed that we were so far out in front that Penn barely made it into the picture frame, and the other boats were completely missing.

So when Coach Gellerman saw me rowing in the tank, he - never being prone to understatement - turned to the Plebes and bellowed "Gentlemen, the oarsman you see rowing in the tank in front of you is Pete Blackledge. You'd do well to watch him. He's a National Champion!!!". I don't think I've ever pushed out a bigger set of puddles than when I was suddenly getting my fifteen seconds of fame in front of those Plebes.

My most fun memory of Coach Gellerman was when he was leading us on a run to the Navy-Marine Corps Stadium to do our daily 68 sets of stadium stairs. As we passed the baseball field



adjacent to the boathouse, one of the USNA Baseball Varsity looked over at us with a particularly arrogant, dismissive look. Coach Gellerman didn't miss it, and didn't let it pass. In his big, booming voice which shook the very foundations of the spectator stands and rattled the bones of every baseball player on the field, Coach Gellerman bellowed "Yeah, give us your toughest look, Mr. Baseball Player. You couldn't survive one fraction of what these men do every day." It was remarkable to see that hapless baseball player physically wither and shrink.

All of us Varsity Heavyweights, though already exhausted, ran our stadium stairs a little faster and with our heads held a little higher that day. We didn't make our goal of the '68 Olympics, but we felt we were truly MEN, tough and forged in the crucible of Coach Gellerman's grueling training. Maybe we couldn't beat all our competitors on the water, but we sure would have kicked their asses off the water!!

• Probably the most unique memory was told to me by our '69 Captain John Collins, involving our classmate, teammate, and friend Michael Gembol. But I have to admit that when I first started my series of phone conversations with Michael's wonderful widow Linda, I was reluctant to share John Collin's memory with her because it IS so unique. Finally, with her encouragement, I - still with some trepidation - shared John Collins' memory. When Linda finally stopped laughing, she said "Peter, that is a wonderful story. It is so very much Michael, and he would love it. You simply HAVE to share it with everyone." So, at the urging of Linda Gembol and her entire family, here is John Collins' memory: John recounted coming out of Hubbard Hall after a Crew practice, looking up, and seeing our teammate Mike Gembol ..... up in a tree ..... hanging upside down ..... with a live snake in one hand. Mike said to John: "Hey John, come take my pet snake. Don't worry; he won't bite you." Now at this point in the story, I am confident that everyone reading this knows EXACTLY what's going to happen next. Unfortunately, John Collins apparently did not. John reached up to take the snake .... AND IT BIT HIM - FEROCIOUSLY AND INTENSELY AND WITH GUSTO !!!

Regarding the wonderfully unique and beloved Mike Gembol: Anyone who knew Michael knew how much he loved his pet snakes. That love brought out his most amazing skill. Michael should have been a State Department Diplomat or Negotiator, because during our rowing tenure he somehow managed to convince all three Navy Varsity Heavyweight Crew coaches to let him keep his pet snakes in Hubbard Hall. And then, when I rented a house in Annapolis after graduation, Michael also managed to convince ME to allow his pet snakes to be our non-paying housemates. For me, that gave our house a whole new meaning to the term "Snake Ranch". But when Mike was so fortunate as to marry his beautiful bride Linda, he and his snakes had met their match. Those slithering snakes immediately became only a memory.

Becoming A Rowing National Champion

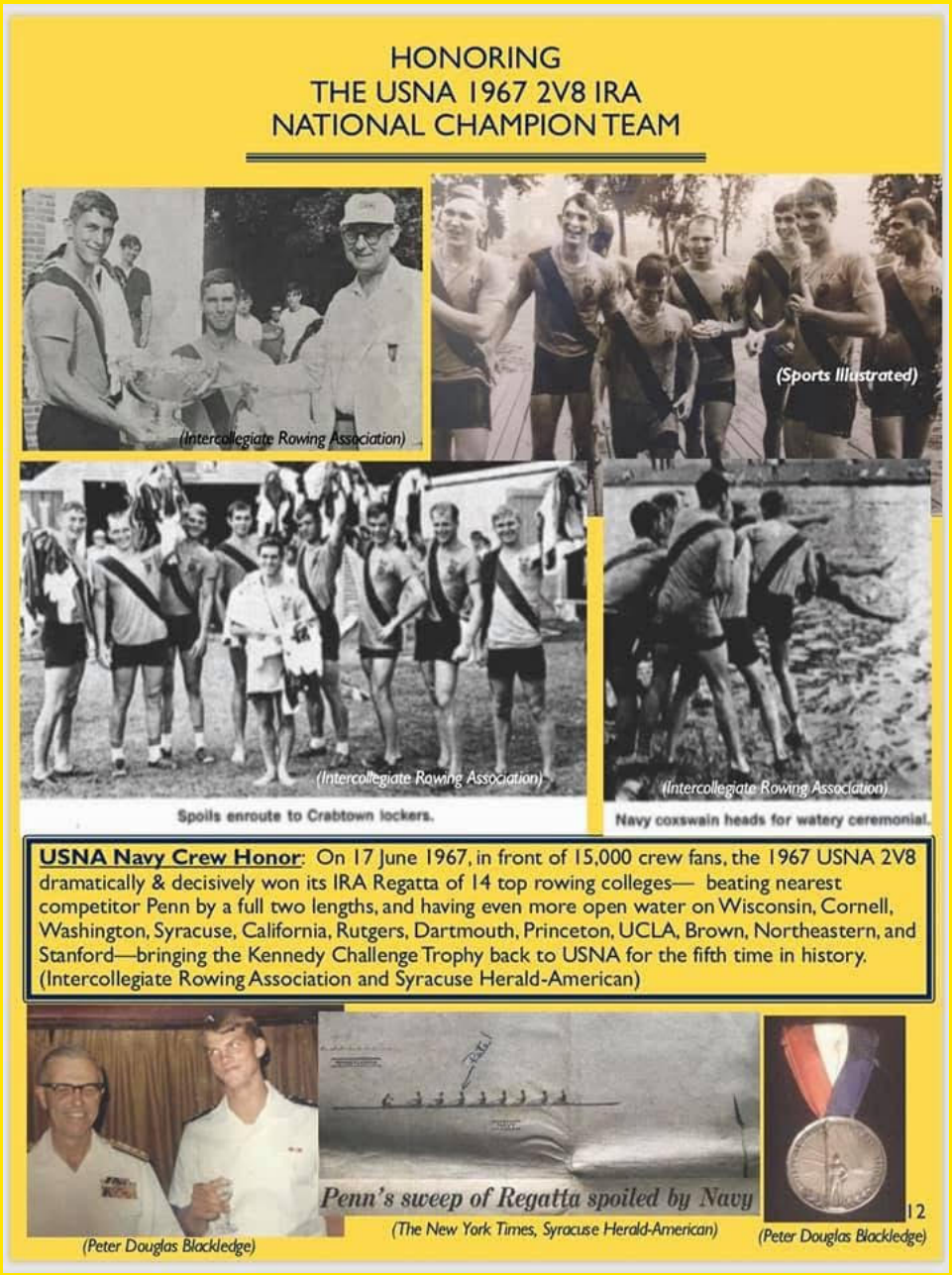
In competitive rowing, there is a phenomenon called "Swing", which is a unique sensation when all eight oarsmen are rowing in such perfect unison and synchronization that rowing seems almost effortless, and the boat virtually glides through the water. My Sophomore year of rowing Varsity Heavyweight crew for United States Naval Academy - 1966 and 1967 - I was blessed to be in a special boat in which we repeatedly and consistently experienced "Swing". It was amazing and exhilarating.

That sensation of "Swing", and its bounty of racing speed, became particularly apparent in our boat's decisive domination of the 2V8 regatta at the 1967 Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Championships. Competitive rowing is a particularly grueling sport, and in a boat of unsynchronized oarsmen can feel that every stroke is like trudging through quicksand. Our champion boat was delightfully different: every stroke was almost effortless ecstasy. I recall that, at the conclusion of our three mile race, I was so ecstatic that I felt our boat could easily continue for another three miles or more. As the United States Naval Academy (USNA) published in their special tribute to our victorious National Champion boat in their 2019 Commemorative Program (segment attached below):

USNA Navy Crew Honor: On 17 June 1967, in front of 15,000 crew fans, the USNA 2V8 dramatically & decisively won its IRA Regatta of 14 top rowing colleges - beating nearest competitor Penn by a full two lengths, and having even more open water on Wisconsin, Cornell, Washington, Syracuse, California, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Princeton, UCLA, Brown, Northeastern, and Stanford - thereby bringing the Kennedy Challenge Trophy back to USNA for only the fifth time in history.

Winning the Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Championships was the most beautiful and exhilarating experience of my life. As I wrote in my Novella "Finding My Omega: The Personal Tribute of a Class Of 1969 United States Naval Academy Son For His Beloved Class Of 1920 United States Naval Academy Father", it was made even sweeter by

sharing it with my father - who despite his advanced age had flown all the way from Houston, Texas, to Syracuse, New York, to sit on Lake Onondaga's weathered wooden grandstands during a raging rainstorm to watch me race. As I detailed in that Novella: "Dad somehow made his way through the crowds of congratulating fans and the IRA Officials, Newsletter reporters, and Magazine reporters who were snapping our pictures - and we shared a mutually tearful and joyful embrace: Father and Son; United States Naval Academy Class of 1920 and United States Naval Academy Class of 1969; Champion Boxer and Champion Oarsman; Alpha and Omega. It was such a gift to have Dad there at the end of my victorious race to share all my accolades, and to have him embrace me while I was experiencing the most extraordinary, euphoric high of my life."


HONORING
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(Peter Douglas Blackledge)
Penn's sweep of Regatta spoiled by Navy
(The New York Times, Syracuse Herald-American)
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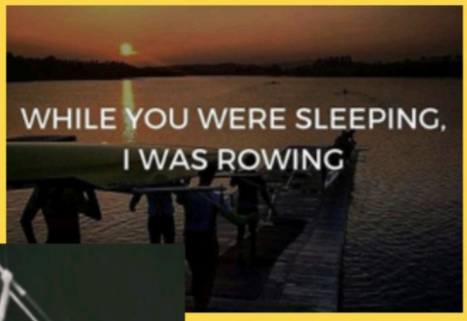
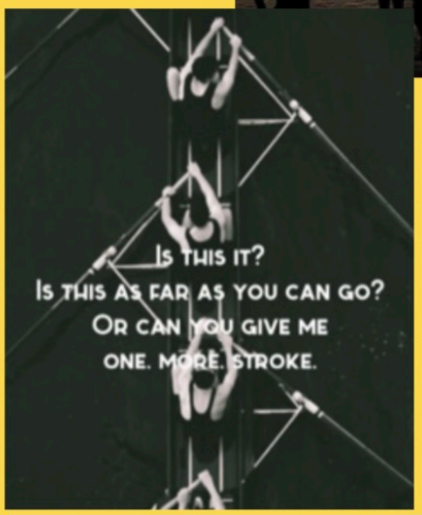
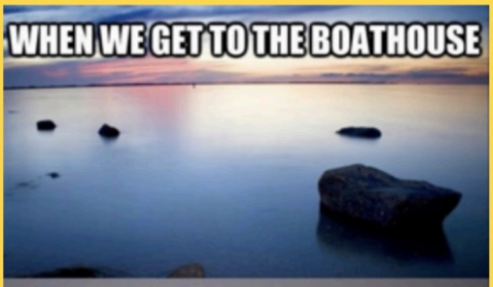
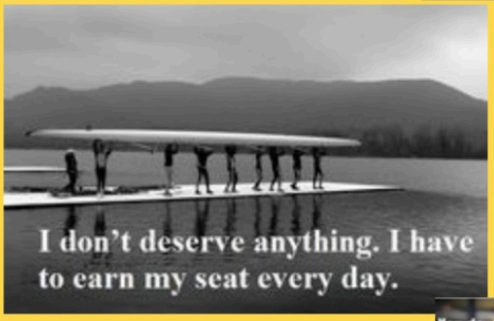
12

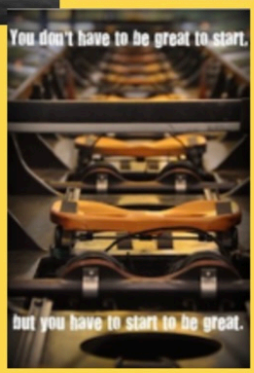
THE ROWING EXPERIENCE

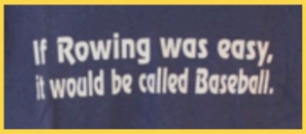












15

Recruited By Olympic Gold Medalist & Rowing Hall Of Fame Coach Allen Rosenberg: Becoming An International Rowing Masters Champion

Champion Masters Four With Coxswain
Bow: Olympic-Rowing-Bronze-Medal-Winner Mark Borchelt
Two: Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Champion & United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman Pete Blackledge
Three: Florida Institute of Technology Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman Geoff Healey
Stroke: University of Pennsylvania Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman Bill Weinberg
Cox: Occoquan Boat Club Champion Coxswain Becky Friedberg

As documented by AI Online:

Allen Rosenberg (1931-2013) was a legendary American rowing coxswain and revolutionary coach, inducted into the Rowing Hall of Fame in 1984 for leading the U.S. to multiple Olympic gold medals, notably the 1964 Olympic Eights, and developing innovative techniques that transformed American rowing into a global force, earning him the nickname "genius on the water".
Key Contributions & Achievements:
1964 Tokyo Olympics: Coached the U.S. Men's Eight to an unexpected gold medal, plus other medals in Coxed Pairs (Gold), Double Sculls (Silver), and Fours (Bronze).
Innovative Techniques: Introduced revolutionary training methods and techniques, known as the "**Rosenberg Style**," which became the dominant "Orthodox Technique" in modern rowing.
U.S. National Teams: Headed numerous U.S. Olympic and World Championship teams, securing multiple gold, silver, and bronze medals across various events through the 1960s and 70s.
Rowing Hall of Fame Inductee: Recognized for his impact as both an athlete and coach, he was enshrined in 1996 (JCC) and 1984 (Rowing Hall of Fame).
Technical Director: Served as the first U.S. National Technical Director for American Rowing, spreading his coaching philosophy nationwide.
Legacy:
Known for his enthusiasm, unique approach, and ability to revitalize the sport, **Rosenberg's impact** extended globally, establishing him as one of rowing's most influential figures.

In early 1988, while I was the Director for Naval Warfare for the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, a man knocked on my Pentagon office door and asked if he could come in to talk with me. I soon realized he was rowing legend Allen Rosenberg - Olympic Gold Medalist and Rowing Hall of Fame Coach who was responsible for more than 24 gold and silver medals at the Olympics and World Championships. I was in the presence of rowing greatness.

Allen explained that he knew of my rowing both Freshman and Varsity Heavyweight Crew for United States Naval Academy, and of my being Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Champion, and that he was in the process of personally hand-picking a Masters racing boat to compete in both National and International Masters Rowing Championships. Allen stated that he wanted to include me as an oarsman in his hand-picked boat. I felt extraordinarily honored, and I immediately accepted Allen's request.

I subsequently met the other seven oarsmen plus coxswain whom Allen had selected for his special Masters racing boat. I was awed. These were each champions from the top rowing colleges in the nation. Allen had even recruited a former Olympic Bronze Medalist oarsman. It felt to me like I was living a rowing version of the 1960s western movie "The Magnificent Seven", in which seven top gunslingers had been individually selected and brought together to liberate a village from oppressive bandits. I felt particularly honored that Allen asked me to row the "Power Seat" in this champions boat. Allen then offered to provide his personal daily coaching on the Concept II ERG rowing simulator to the two rowing positions which he considered to be the particularly important to our boat's success: (1) My "Power Seat" and (2) The "Stroke" position, with that position being filled by Bill, a former University of Pennsylvania Varsity Heavyweight oarsman.

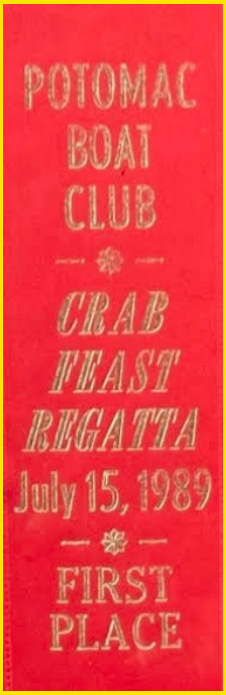
During my four years of rowing at United States Naval Academy, I had three different coaches - including one who had coached the Naval Academy rowing team to an astounding "Clean Sweep" of the Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Championships in 1965, winning every category against the top rowing colleges in the nation. But I soon experienced that Allen - who had made rowing history not only by coaching rowing teams to 24 gold and silver medals at the Olympics and world championships, but also by putting together and coaching a team which in 1964 crushed the vaunted Harvard University rowing team and then went on to win the Olympic Gold Medal - was decidedly superior to my previous three coaches. In fact, he was truly amazing in his coaching expertise.

Each day during our lunch hour, Bill and I would meet at Allen's condominium in Crystal City, where Allen would provide an hour of intense coaching for us on his ERG. It was an extraordinary experience. Allen would intensely watch each of us as we rowed on his ERG, and although each of his series of instructions seemed subtle - "Lift your toes"; "Push through the balls of your feet"; "Push against the small of your back"; "Lift with your fingertips at the catch"; "Reach for more extension" - as Bill and I would implement each of Allen's active coaching instructions, thereby better aligning our power, we would immediately see our ERG time for 500 meters improve ten points, and then ten points again, and then ten points again. It was astonishing and exhilarating.

Allen's personal coaching continued for our full boat on the water at Occoquan Boat Club (OBC). And our special boat kept getting faster and faster. When our first opportunity to race arrived, we were ready and psyched and hungry.

Our "debut" race occurred at the annual "Crab Feast Regatta", July 15, 1989, on the Potomac River in Washington DC - in which we entered in the highest competitive category: "Open Eight." It was sponsored each year by the venerable Potomac Boat Club (PBC), at which Olympic and National Champion oarsmen regularly rowed, and all the local colleges and boat clubs were invited to compete. Historically, PBC had always decisively won each regatta; it was a matter of great pride to PBC that none of the local college teams or other boat clubs even came close to successfully vying with PBC in the race. As we arrived at the PBC's boathouse, the arrogance and dismissiveness of PBC oarsmen toward our Occoquan Boat Club (OBC) oarsmen in our first ever race was deeply disturbing. "That's okay, enjoy your petty braggadocio for now" I thought to myself; "because 'There's A New Sheriff In Town', and when we get on the water with you, we are going to crush you." And we did.

For the race, our OBC boat was placed next to the PBC boat. By the end of our Racing Start, we had already taken three seats from PBC and even more from the local colleges and boat clubs. As I previously wrote about in describing my Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Champions boat, our "Allen Rosenberg" OBC boat's "Swing" was in full force. Every stroke was a sweet joy, propelling our boat forward as if it were gliding on glass. By 1000 meters, we had increased our lead on PBC and the rest of the field by almost a full boat length. PBC furiously fought back, but every time their coxswain called for a "Big 10", our coxswain responded by also calling for a "Big 10" so that PBC did not gain even an inch. By the 1500 meter mark, we could feel the PBC boat becoming frantic. In all the years which they had sponsored this regatta, no crew had ever come close to beating them. And now, this boat by OBC - whom PBC had assumed would provide no competition to PBC - was severely trouncing them. And after we glided across the finish line more than a boat length ahead of PBC, we were not greeted with congratulations but with scowls. At the ceremony after the race, PBC did not even present us with the customary Crab Feast Regatta trophy; they refused to relinquish their trophy, and only gave us only the accompanying First Place ribbons.



"That's okay", I thought ; "We made our strong statement on the water, where it counts.".

Following our resounding victory at the Crab Feast Regatta, our next race was the "Head Of The Occoquan Regatta", where we decided to race our superb Masters Four. Again, we decisively won.

Next came our entry into International Masters competition. We shipped our racing shells and equipment and ourselves to Canada, where we entered both our Eight and our Four in the Canadian National Masters Championships, and our Four in the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta. We were eagerly looking forward to showcasing our very fast Four at the Canadian National Masters

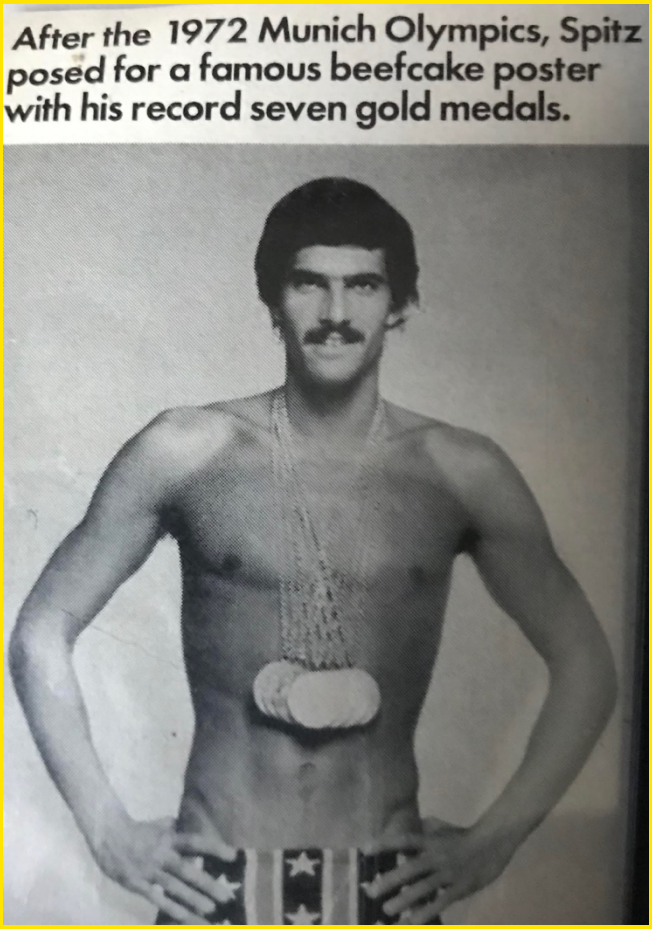
Championships, but disaster struck. Our bow man - Olympic-Rowing-Bronze-Medal-Winner Mark Borchelt - was held up in traffic, and couldn't be there in time for our Masters Four race. We unfortunately had to substitute an OBC oarsman who was not one of the "Rosenberg Chosen". The result was dramatic. It was immediately evident that our "Swing" was gone. Even worse: As we were warming up, the replacement bow oarsman plaintively called out to our Stroke man "Bill, please tell Pete to stop rowing so hard!!! He's pulling me around on every stroke." OMG. Our "Fab-Four" had sadly degenerated to "Flawed-Four". Our remaining three oarsmen somehow managed to pull out a Silver Medal in that race, but it was very upsetting to me that after a year of very hard work, our perfect First Place Gold Medal record was now permanently tarnished. Fortunately, our Olympic bow man managed to make it to our second race, in our Eight. It felt so good to have our "Great Eight" back together, and to again feel that wonderful "Swing", as we again decisively won our First Place Gold medal in that race.

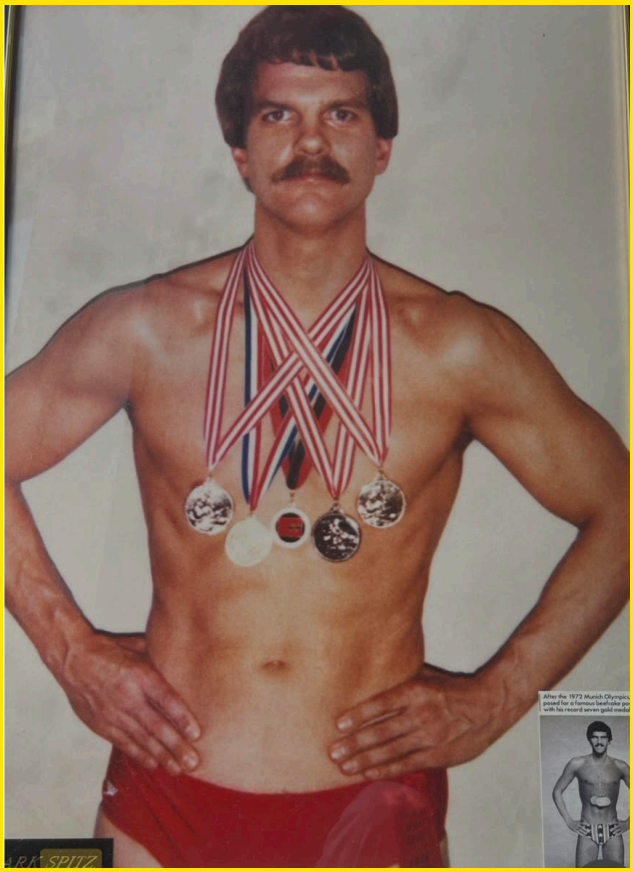
At the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta, we again entered our fastest boat: our "Fab Four", which is pictured above having decisively pulled ahead of all competition. It was a beautiful experience, and a sweet completion to our amazing 1989 rowing season.

The USA Olympic Rowing Team had their picture taken with us, and it was interesting to see that Bill and I towered over most of the USA Olympic Rowing Team oarsmen.

That's mustachioed me on the right of the picture wearing the white with horizontal red and black stripe OBC Racing Shirt, with our awesome OBC Stroke Man Mustachioed Bill immediately to my right-back.

After our races, as our OBC team was jubilantly donning our bevy of medals, some of my teammates noted my resemblance to Marc Spitz and dared me to parody the iconic Marc Spitz pose after the 1972 Munich Olympics - in which he had arrayed his medals across his chest.





Naval Sea Systems Command published a full front page special coverage of our successes in their premier magazine “The Observer”.

The Observer

Naval Sea Systems Command Arlington, Va. October 16, 1989

NAVSEA Oarsmen Win in International Competition

Row, row, row your boat, swiftly to the gold. . . .

That may have been the tune that was on four NAVSEA employee's lips recently after winning an unprecedented number of gold and silver individual medals in international rowing competition. At both the Royal Canadian Henley and Canadian Masters Championships in Ontario, Canada. Michael Dean and Geoffrey Healey (both from SEA OOC), Bill Weinberg (SEA 023), and Pete Blackledge (formerly of SEA 06D, now in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Shipbuilding and Logistics (ASN/S+L), were part of a team that brought back 76 gold and silver individual medals from the Summer '89 Masters rowing competition in Canada.

All four had been varsity oarsmen in college and were more than familiar with rowing, but the team was fortunate to have Allen Rosenberg, formerly an ASN(S+L) employee, as their coach. Mr. Rosenberg was the U. S. national coach for both the World Championship and Olympic teams, and also guided the U. S. Rowing Team to the gold in the 1964 Olympics.

The men only last fall joined the Occoquan Boat Club (OBC) and formed "the team" described above. The men began a regimen of vigorous training to ready themselves for local competition and eventually the Canadian Masters Rowing Championship.

Locally, the OBC crew rowed against boat clubs and collegiate crews from the East Coast at the "Crab Feast Regatta" winning their event and posting the fastest time in the whole regatta. In the Canadian National Championships, the OBC crew finished either first or second in each of the final 12 events that they entered.

They finished as gold medalists in nine of the events and won silver in the other three.

If you're interested in joining a rowing team, or just talking "crew," contact Mr. Blackledge on X22257, or Mr. Weinberg on X28306

(Above) The OBC eight-oared shell won the Crab Feast Regatta, posting the fastest time of the day.

(Left) "Photo opportunity" after winning the gold medal in their event, Pete Blackledge (front row, far right) and Bill Weinberg (back row, far right) pose with the U. S. National (Olympic) Rowing Team at the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta.

GRADUATING INTO TWO WARS
Standing America's Watch Against
The Soviet Threat
As A Cold War Warrior
17
10

Steel on Station, Missiles Ready, Watch Unbroken: Surface Warfare Officers Standing the Line Against the Menacing Red Tide

In June of 1969, Peter and his United States Naval Academy Class of 1969 graduated into two wars. Those who were commissioned as Second Lieutenants in the United States Marine Corps predominantly went to fight the Hot War in the jungles of Vietnam. Peter was commissioned as Ensign in the United States Navy, and went to fight the Cold War, nose-to-nose against the menacing Soviet Navy ships in the Mediterranean. Peter served multiple back-to-back Mediterranean deployments, first in Guided Missile Destroyer USS CONYNGHAM (DDG-17), and then in Guided Missile Cruiser USS ALBANY (CG-10). As documented in ChatGPT:

"The Soviet ships in the Mediterranean were more than merely provocative toward the United States—they were bluntly reckless because their actions repeatedly created the real risk of accidents, miscalculation, and unintended war during an already tense Cold War environment.

First, Soviet naval behavior deliberately ignored established safety norms at sea. Soviet vessels frequently conducted extremely close maneuvers around U.S. Navy ships, sometimes crossing bows at short distances or shadowing American carriers and submarines for long periods. These actions were not symbolic gestures; they endangered crews on both sides. In a confined and busy body of water like the Mediterranean, even a minor navigational error could have caused collisions with catastrophic consequences.

Second, their actions escalated military tension rather than deterring conflict. The Mediterranean was a critical operating zone for NATO, U.S. aircraft carriers, and nuclear-armed submarines. By aggressively tracking U.S. ships and simulating attack profiles, Soviet commanders increased the

chance that American forces would misinterpret intent and respond defensively—or even offensively. This kind of brinkmanship made crisis management harder, not easier.

Third, Soviet recklessness was amplified by poor communication and rigid command structures. Unlike later Cold War periods, early and mid–Cold War naval encounters lacked robust incident-prevention agreements. Soviet captains had limited flexibility and were under pressure to demonstrate resolve to Moscow. This meant that even obviously dangerous maneuvers were carried out to fulfill political expectations rather than tactical necessity.

Finally, the stakes were extraordinarily high. Many U.S. and Soviet ships in the Mediterranean carried nuclear weapons or supported nuclear-capable forces. Reckless harassment in such circumstances was not just provocative—it risked triggering a chain reaction of alerts, mobilizations, and retaliatory moves that neither side may have intended or been able to stop.

In short, Soviet naval actions went beyond signaling strength. By consistently endangering ships, crews, and strategic stability, they crossed into recklessness—gambling that intimidation would not spiral into disaster in one of the most volatile theaters of the Cold War."

It was into this threatening environment that Peter and many of his fellow United States Naval Academy Ensigns graduated. No longer Midshipmen, their stresses were now very different, real-world, and serious. Every day was a challenge, but every day gave them an opportunity to serve their country in a vital and meaningful way. This is what they had trained for; this is what they lived. They were men, they were warriors, and they were ready.

Honest, XO, We Never Noticed That Motorcycle In The Center Of Our Stateroom

Peter's first roommate in USS ALBANY (CG-10) was Chuck Bennis, a totally dedicated motorcycle lover. Chuck was not only the owner and rider of several motorcycles, he was also a superb motorcycle mechanic who could disassemble and reassemble a motorcycle as routinely as a U.S. Special Forces member can "field strip" their M4/M16 weapon. Additionally, Chuck was a highly respected member of the motorcycle racing community.

When USS ALBANY made port calls in Spain, Chuck's unrequited yearning to have a motorcycle by his side overpowered him. His unique solution was to buy and disassemble a motorcycle ashore, surreptitiously smuggle it past the ALBANY Quarterdeck watch one piece at a time, and reassemble it in Peter's and Chuck's stateroom. Peter watched with both amazement and trepidation as Chuck finally completed his motorcycle reassembly in their stateroom. Unfortunately, that reassembly completed just prior to ALBANY's Executive Officer (XO) conducting a surprise inspection of all Officer's Quarters staterooms. Peter shared with me that the complete look of disbelief on the XO's face as he suddenly swung open the door to Peter's and Chuck's stateroom and saw that complete motorcycle was priceless.

(Chuck waiting for his race to begin)

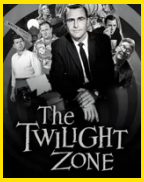
My Journey
Through
The Looking Glass:
Stranger In A Strange Land
As Peter Transitions
From Military To Civilian

My Journey Through
The Looking Glass

By Peter Blackledge

When I was growing up, one of my favorite television shows was Rod Serling's "The Twilight Zone", which was reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's "Through The Looking Glass" novel. Both involved individuals suddenly - in Carroll's words - "entering a world where everything is reversed", and as stated in Serling's iconic opening phrase **"There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call... The Twilight Zone."**

In 1977, when I had completed my four years as a Midshipman at the United States Naval Academy and my seven years of obligated military service as a Naval Officer in the Fleet, I personally journeyed through my own surreal experiences as I walked from my eleven years of military life "Through The Looking Glass" into the parallel universe of civilian life. Rod Serling might have described it as follows:



(Opening Theme Music for "The Twilight Zone")
https://youtu.be/XVSRm80WzZk?si=GdDLIIVvA0h5G2FA

Submitted for your approval: One Peter Douglas Blackledge, a United States Naval Academy graduate and Naval Officer, who - after eleven years of total immersion in a Blue & Gold world - in 1977 suddenly found himself traveling Through The Looking Glass into a strange new dimension, where down is up, and up is down. There's a signpost up ahead - his next stop, "The Civilian Zone", where:

The Uniform Of The Day has changed from "Service Dress Blue" to "Tom-Selleck-Magnum-PI" Scandalously-Short Faded-Blue-Jean-Shorts.

Parades on the pristinely manicured grass of Worden Field have changed to playing Volleyball on the sweat-laden sand courts of Oakwood Singles Apartments.

Marching to the anthems of John Phillip Sousa has changed to Disco Dancing to the thunderous beat of Michael Jackson.

Drinking from Silver Pitchers containing Naval Academy Farm 2% Milk has changed to drinking from Silver Kegs containing Lager Beer.

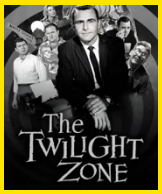
Being surrounded by a cadre of smelly ship personnel has changed to being surrounded by throngs of sweet-smelling beautiful bikini-clad women

Salutes are replaced with High Fives.

Rushed two-chews-and-a-swallow meals eating Philadelphia Scrapple, Scuba Steak, and Cannonballs With Hard Sauce, washed down with Bug Juice, under the harsh, glaring lights of King Hall, has been replaced with relaxed dining on the finest cuisine and French wine under romantic lighting.

Attempting to go to sleep, alone, in a hard ship's bunk bed, with only 7 inches of clearance to the bed above, lulled to sleep by the sweet dulcet tones of a gruff voice barking "Now taps, taps! Lights out! Maintain silence throughout the ship!", then periodically being awakened by a strange man shinning a flashlight in the eyes before apologizing "Sorry, wrong rack", followed by occasionally being shaken out of bed by the clarion call "Now general quarters, general quarters! All hands man your battle stations!", followed by the harsh mandatory awakening at 5am each morning of "Reveille, reveille, all hands heave out and trice up" has been replaced by gently drifting off to sleep on a cushioned king size bed wrapped in the warm arms of a beautiful woman and deliciously sleeping uninterrupted past Noon.

And so concludes tonight's bill of fare, a case filed under "S" for "Stranger In A Strange Land: Shangri-La" …..
from "The Civilian Zone",

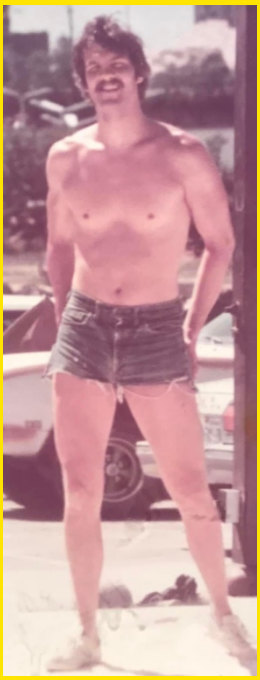


(Closing Theme Music for "The Twilight Zone")
https://youtu.be/XVSRm80WzZk?si=GdDLIIVvA0h5G2FA

Here is my detailed experience:

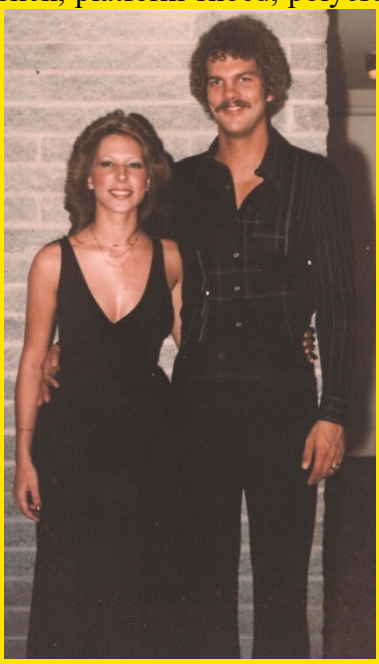
Stranger In A Strange Land

Although I felt honored to serve my country, and privileged to serve with the outstanding officers and men of the United States Navy, I always felt a bit like a square peg in a round hole. In 1977, having completed my Obligated Military Service, I was personally selected by Rear Admiral Hall of Naval Sea Systems Command to lead a new Gas Turbine endeavor in a Department of the Navy civilian engineer/manager position at Naval Sea Systems Command in Arlington, Virginia. My Naval Academy Class of 1963 graduate brother Mike, who had recently been living in that area while working in the Pentagon, suggested that I consider moving into a very popular Singles apartment complex named Oakwood in nearby Alexandria, Virginia. ("Singles Only" apartments had become very popular in the 1970s). I checked it out and absolutely loved the very active lifestyle which Oakwood offered: two outdoor sand volleyball courts, outdoor jacuzzis, tennis courts, and two gyms, with weekly dances and a panoply of other singles activities. And after eleven straight (pun intended) years as a prim and proper Naval Officer, I was eagerly ready to let my hair down (again, pun intended). I was ecstatic about finding that my fellow Oakwood residents were all single, young professionals - as I now was - and I now joyfully embraced the quasi-college fraternity life which I had missed as a United States Naval Academy Midshipman. I soon discovered that the "Uniform Of The Day" for guys at Oakwood was the outrageously short blue jean cutoffs which came to be popularized by Tom Selleck in his Golden Globe and Emmy Awarded T.V. Show "Magnum PI". Always one to adhere to uniform requirements, I quickly assimilated. Every sunny day was joyously celebrated on Oakwood's sand volleyball courts by we Oakwood guys ebulliently channeling Magnum PI Tom Selleck's mustachioed, curly-permed, sand-volleyball-playing persona by wearing those outrageously-short blue-jean-cutoffs, with our bronzed, bikinied girlfriends playing by our side. It was a wonderful symphony of sounds and motions: the beauty of a soft volleyball handset or deftly guided bump set, the loud whack of the volleyball spike, the crunch of sand beneath defensive players diving to dig that spike, and the admiring applause from the other volleyball teams watching intently on the sidelines as they waited to play against the winning team. Communications crystallized into shouts of encouragement and strategy between teammates, and friendly taunting and trash talk against the opposing team. All of these scenes would periodically cease only long enough for gang runs into the swimming pool to cool off and let the sand slide from our sugar cookie bodies, or to the outdoor jacuzzi to relax beneath its bubbling warmth. And there was always the omnipresent silver keg of ice-cold beer which one of the participants would bring.



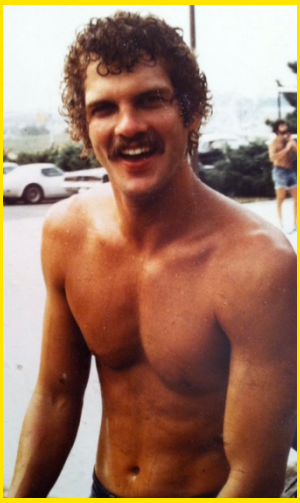
Disco Made Me Do It!!!

As the sunlight faded, we volleyball players would return to our apartments just long enough to shower and then emerge as our nighttime alter egos, with each guy channeling John Travolta's slick, platform-shoed, polyester-shirted “Saturday Night Fever” persona and each woman stylin’ with their glam makeup, stiletto heels, and diaphanous dresses. Together we would pulsate to the pounding Disco beat. Never had I been joyfully closer to blissful Nirvana Transcendence.



Feeling The Perm

My new girlfriend advised me that something was missing from my new civilian “Uniform Of The Day”. I reacted to her advice by instinctively snapping back to my United States Naval Academy days, wondering what could be wrong with my uniform. Was my Gig Line off? Was there a Smile in my Cover? Had I not adequately removed the Quartermaster from my Belt Buckle? No, my girlfriend responded; I was missing the very popular Magnum PI Tom Selleck inspired Curley-Hair-Perm. I hesitated at first, but then considered I had such superb success as a Midshipman at United States Naval Academy and as a Naval Officer by fully complying with all uniform requirements, so I decided to complete The Full Monty. Curly-haired-perm it would be.



If You Think I'm Sexy,
Come On Sugar Tell Me So

A third persona which was prevalent in the late 1970's/1980s was Rod Steward's "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy". In that vein, Discos in the Washington DC area were displaying more and more visual and participation art. One example of the visual was the full-size statue of Eve at the popular Apple Of Eve disco in the L' Enfant Plaza. In this photo from that disco, I found my transformed-self posing for a photo at Apple Of Eve disco by playfully resting my hand on Eve's bronze breast while taking a bite of her proffered apple.

Please don't tell my United States Naval Academy 16th Company Officer about any of my above military transgressions, as I would most certainly be found guilty of multiple "Class A" offenses.

The Ballad Of The
Senior Executive Service (SES)

A Satirical Parody

To Be Sung To The 1960s Anthem

"The Ballad Of The Green Berets"

Click Here To Sing Along

Written & Copyright 1996

By Peter Blackledge

Put silver pin upon our chest
To tell the world we're the bureaucrats' best
Pushing paper is our greatest test
We're the women and men of the SES

Briefcase in hand we face the day
On Gucci shoes stride into the fray
Warfighters may scoff we don't care what they say
'Cause our salary's higher than a General's pay

Put silver pin upon our chest
To tell the world we're the bureaucrats' best
With exorbitant bonuses we build our nest
We're the women and men of the SES

Our valiant deeds will make you gape
We're Super Heroes without a cape
Throughout the government we traipse
Subduing our enemies with Red Tape

Put silver pin upon our chest
To tell the world we're the bureaucrats' best
We can be as pushy as a Packwood kiss
We're the women and men of the SES

Our time is precious we just can't wait
Chauffeured cars we activate
On cellular phone we communicate
We're Government Yuppies Jack Anderson hates

Put silver pin upon our chest
To tell the world we're the bureaucrats' best
We are one cut above the rest
We're the women and men of the SES

We get more perks than King Saul
We're equivalent to an Admiral
But on Snow Days or in Furlough
We are declared Non-essential

Put silver pin upon our chest
To tell the world we're the bureaucrats' best
Our trips are more controversial than Rudolph Hess'
We're the women and men of the SES

Such royal treatment makes it plain to see
We're Uncle Sam's aristocracy
But we've worked so hard to be where we be
(Unless we are a Schedule C)

Put silver pin upon our chest
To tell the world we're the bureaucrats' best
We are trained to say "Yes"
We're the women and men of the SES

Our dedication we often tout
Service is what we're about
Of our perseverance there is no doubt
Unless we're offered a big buy-out

Put silver pin upon our chest
To tell the world we're the bureaucrats' best
We perpetuate the Government's mess
We're the women and men of the SES

From The Louvre & Champs-Élysées To Buddhist Temples & Great Wall Of China

My Around-The-World Adventure

In 1998, I was exceptionally honored by being selected for the very exclusive Department of Defense (DoD) Executive Study Program (ESP). Under this senior level post-graduate program, I was given a year off from my job, while still receiving my full pay, to obtain my Master of Science (MS) degree - with all costs pertaining to my MS degree fully paid by the U.S. Government. I would be participating in this program with other distinguished senior executives from each of the U.S. military services, U.S. government agencies, and our U.S. ally governments.

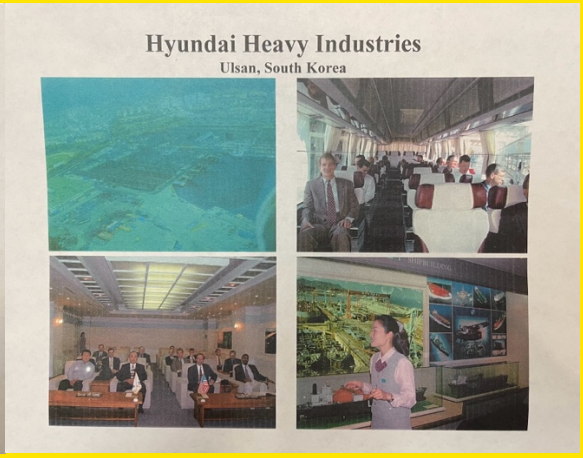
When I graduated at the top of my class, and was named Distinguished Graduate of the Class of 2000, I was selected for the additional high honor of my representing the United States of America and leading a cadre of twelve U.S. senior Department of Defense and Government executives plus a Brazilian Navy Captain and Polish Brigadier General in an around-the-world inspection of U.S. and foreign industrial facilities. It was an extraordinary experience. From Washington DC, we flew West, with stops in California, Hawaii, Japan, South Korea, China, and France. Our trip was a very heady experience, as we received special VIP aircraft and helicopter trips for travel from one location to another, with industry executives clustered around each of our landing points to receive us with honors. In South Korea, we inspected industrial facilities in Pusan and Ulsan and visually stared down North Korean soldiers at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The DMZ had a unique eerie feeling, which stayed with me. Next we flew to China, inspecting numerous facilities in Shanghai and Beijing. And finally we flew to France, inspecting facilities in Nantes and Paris before continuing and completing our aerial circumnavigation journey by flying to Washington DC.

My favorite experiences were traversing the Champs-Elysees through the Arc de Triomphe, and climbing the Eiffel Tower,

Touring the Louvre,

and, of course, walking The Great Wall of China.

Following is a collage of photos from my amazing around-the-world adventure:



Shanghai, China
Welcome
I was amazed by the high-tech skyline
And amused by the straw hats provided at the low-tech shipyard

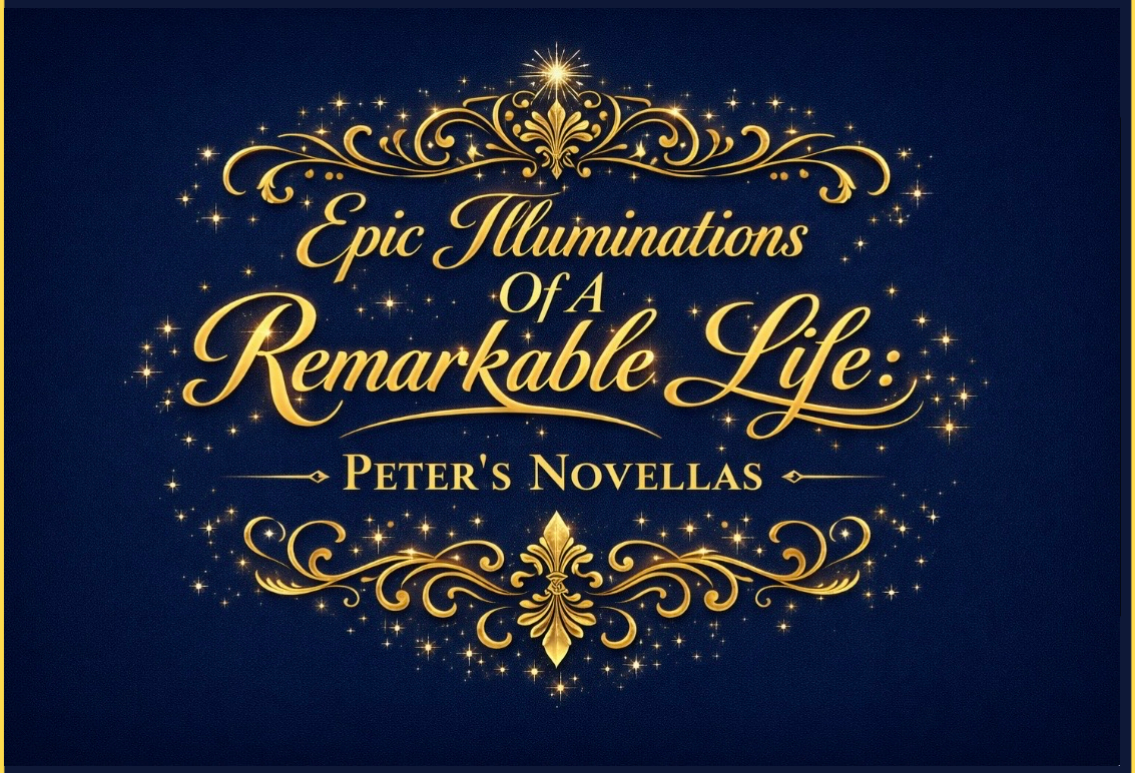
Shanghai, China

Shanghai, China

Beijing, China

Nantes, France

Paris, France


Epic Illuminations
Of A
Remarkable Life:
Peter's Novellas

“Finding My Omega”

The Personal Tribute of
A United States Naval Academy Son
For His Beloved
United States Naval Academy Father
by Peter Blackledge, USNA ‘69

Blackledge Urban Living Legend (“BULL”) Stories”, aka “BS”, abound in the Blackledge family regarding events surrounding my birth:

(BULL/BS #1) When my Father, who was returning from a lengthy deployment absence due to World War II, called my Mother to advise of when he would arrive home, Mother put my then-5-year-old brother Michael on the phone to say "Daddy, I want a little brother";

(BULL/BS #2) Although I was his fifth child, Dad was reportedly so ecstatic at my birth that the doctors asked him if I were his first child;

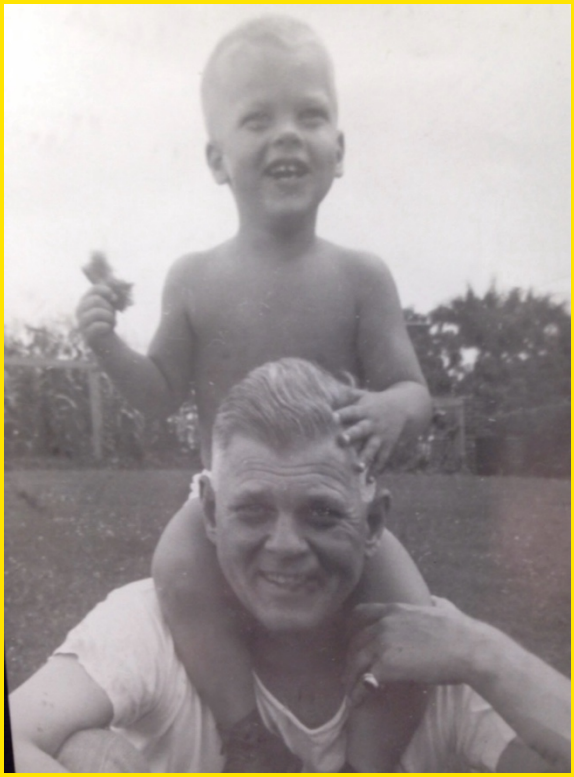
(BULL/BS #3) After siring three girls and a boy, my Father was so desirous of having another son that he immediately asked to see the physical proof of my maleness, and then - to the shock if not horror of all persons standing in the vicinity - he hoisted me high in the air to publicly display and proclaim my manhood;

(BULL/BS #4) Having reluctantly acceded to my Mother's desire to name me "Timothy", Dad took advantage of my Mother's anesthetized bedridden post-birth status to change that name on my birth certificate to his favorite name: "Peter.”

Whie I cannot personally attest to the veracity of such BULL/BS, there is one fact which I personally know to be incontrovertibly true: Much like the Biblical account of Jacob and his youngest son Joseph, my 51-year-old Father absolutely delighted in me as the "child of his elder years." And although he was very busy with his high-profile position as Commanding Officer of Naval Ordnance Plant, Indianapolis (NOPI),

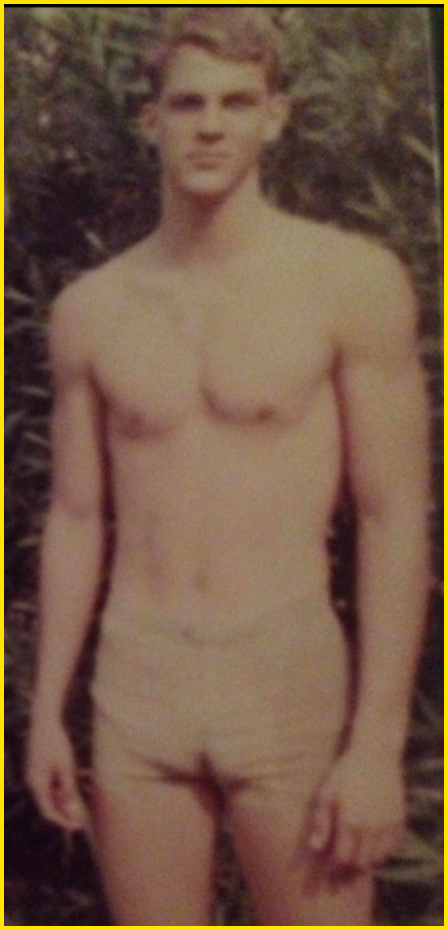
receiving such Navy luminaries as four-star Admiral Ingram and five-star Fleet Admiral Leahy,

Father never failed to rush home each night to spend time with me, carrying me around our back yard on his shoulders.



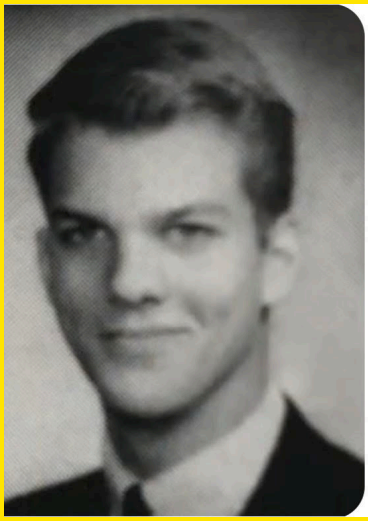
Immediately following his retirement from the Navy, our family moved to Houston, Texas, where Dad became Vice President & General Manager of Cameron Iron Works. As I grew up, my very close relationship with Dad continued; he was always exceptionally kind, patient, understanding, and supportive despite my many shortcomings. Whereas Dad had been a Star Quarterback on his high school football team, and had been a Champion Boxer at United States Naval Academy, I unfortunately was the skinny kid who was always chosen last for our neighborhood sports teams. And whereas Dad was always gregarious and outgoing, I could often be painfully shy. Even when, like the Biblical "Prodigal Son", I went far astray into a plethora of youthful indiscretions, Dad never gave up on me - he always encouraged me. He often referred to the two of us as his being "The Alpha" and my being "The Omega", reflecting his being "The Alpha" progenitor, and my "The Omega" last progeny.

When, in 8th grade, I asked Dad to buy me a set of weightlifting equipment for Christmas, he did (cleverly disguising the gift under our Christmas tree, and labeling it for another family member, to make it a total surprise for me) - even though he was probably assuming that I would soon lose interest in it as I had with most other gifts and activities. But, once again, he had the faith in me to keep trying to help me find my spark & my direction. My father's confidence, and that gift, helped to turn my life around - as the scrawny, gangly, non-athletic kid amazingly began to gain significant muscularity, prompting Dad to start referring to me as "Little Abner, just 15 1/2 yar' old" (after the muscular comic strip teenager drawn by Al Capp).

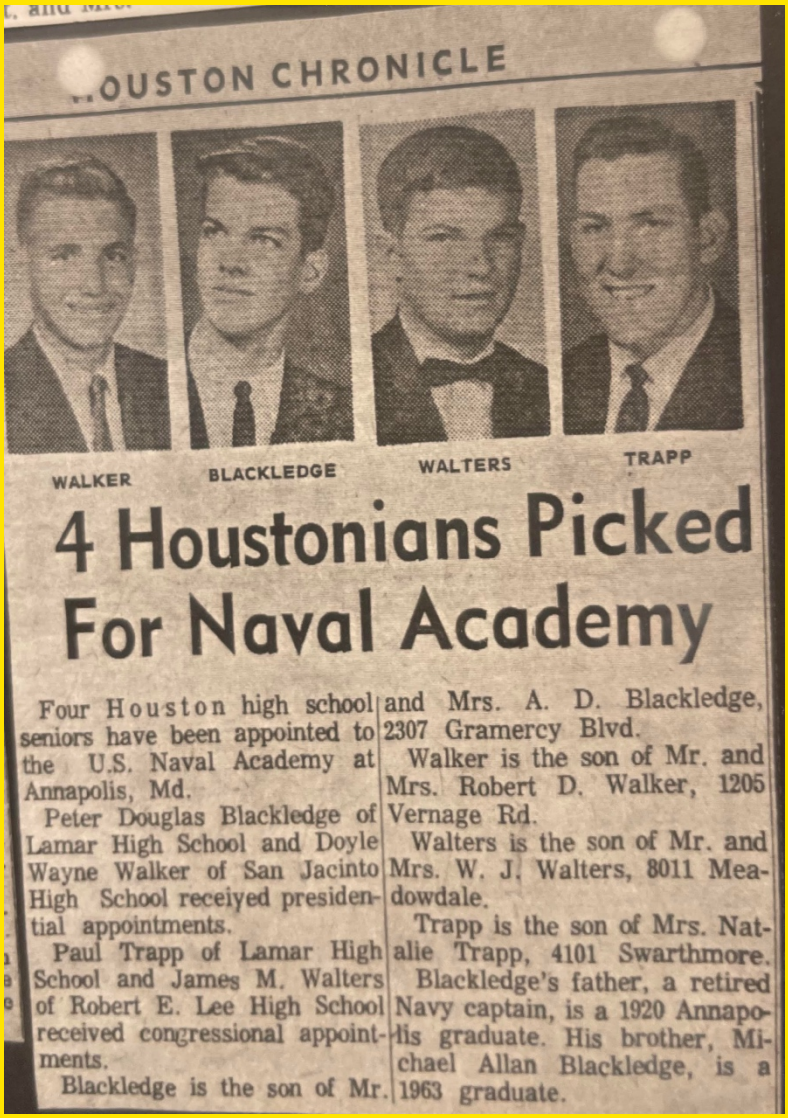


My increased strength & size, and the attendant athleticism which it brought me, surprisingly allowed me to even make my high school's basketball team and win my letter,

and the resultant self-confidence transformed me to be much more social and outgoing, causing me to become active in various social and academic organizations, even being elected to be an officer of my high school fraternity.



All of which probably contributed to my being selected by President Lyndon Johnson for appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy.



...OUSTON CHRONICLE

WALKER BLACKLEDGE WALTERS TRAPP

4 Houstonians Picked For Naval Academy

Four Houston high school seniors have been appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md.

Peter Douglas Blackledge of Lamar High School and Doyle Wayne Walker of San Jacinto High School received presidential appointments.

Paul Trapp of Lamar High School and James M. Walters of Robert E. Lee High School received congressional appointments.

Blackledge is the son of Mr. and Mrs. A. D. Blackledge, 2307 Gramercy Blvd.

Walker is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Walker, 1205 Vernage Rd.

Walters is the son of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Walters, 8011 Meadowdale.

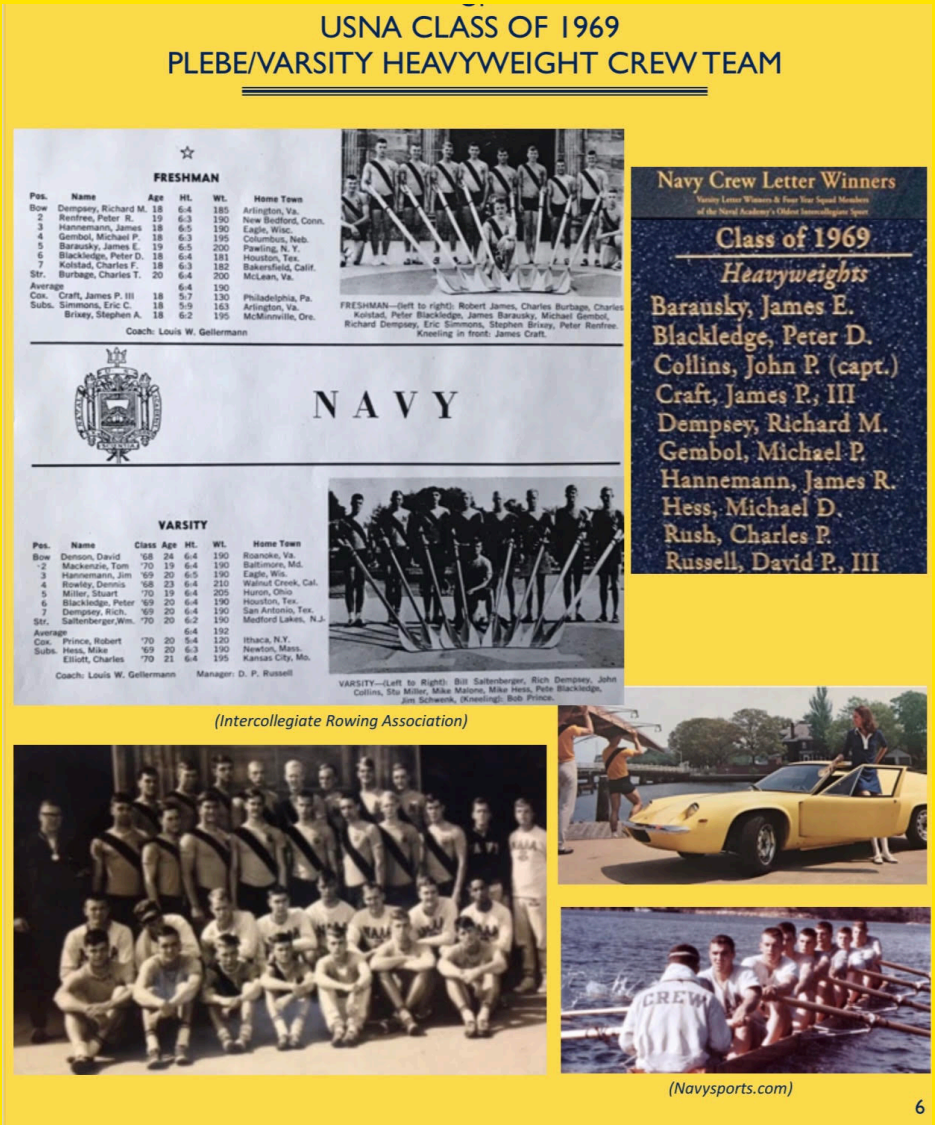
Trapp is the son of Mrs. Natalie Trapp, 4101 Swarthmore.

Blackledge's father, a retired Navy captain, is a 1920 Annapolis graduate. His brother, Michael Allan Blackledge, is a 1963 graduate.

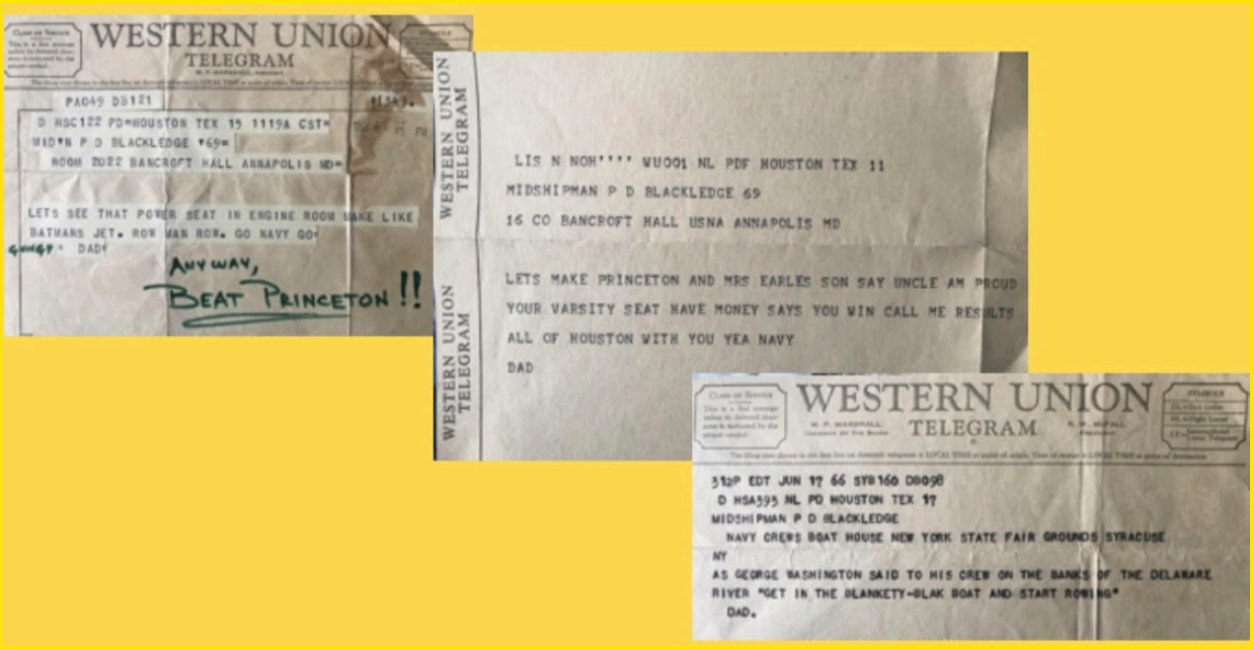
Dad was elated that his youngest child would be attending his alma mater, and I was pleasantly surprised to have been accepted to the same college from which both my father (United States Naval Academy Class Of 1920) and my idolized and extraordinarily accomplished older brother Michael (United States Naval Academy Class Of 1963) had graduated. In his United States Naval Academy Class Of 1920, Dad had been a Champion Boxer, but he suggested that my height, lean musculature, and strength would be a perfect fit for rowing crew at the Naval Academy. As a Texas boy, I knew nothing about crew, had never even seen a racing shell, and was concerned that I could not compete in rowing on a collegiate level - particularly at a top rowing college like the Naval Academy, which the year before I was to start there had won every event at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships -

HONORING
THE USNA 1965 "CLEAN SWEEP"
- V8, 2V8, & F8 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS -
Mighty Middies sweep lake
Navy eyes Harvard
1965 IRA Champions
Varsity Eight, Junior Varsity Eight, Freshmen Eight
(USNA Class of 1967 Memorial)
USNA Navy Crew Honor: In 1965, USNA won the Varsity 8, 2V8, and Freshman 8 competitions, completing a "Clean Sweep". USNA has won the Varsity Heavyweight Men's Eight IRA National Championships twelve times: 1921, 1922, 1925, 1931, 1938, 1947, 1952, 1953, 1965, 1980, 1984, and 1992 (3-Way Tie).
("IRA National Championship Regatta", irarowing.com)
Athletes carrying Coach Paul Quinn to the dock
for a celebratory swim in Lake Onondaga
(USNA Class of 1967 Memorial)
11

but I was determined to go hard for it. So I tried out for the USNA crew team - and even though I only weighed between 165 pounds and 170 pounds, I decided to try out for the premier "Heavyweight" division. Fortunately, the tremendous strength which my dedicated weightlifting had brought me and my personal determination resulted in my being selected for First Boat on the Freshman Heavyweight Crew team and then again for First Boat each successive year on the Varsity Heavyweight Crew team.


USNA CLASS OF 1969
PLEBE/VARSITY HEAVYWEIGHT CREW TEAM
FRESHMAN
Pos. Name Age Ht. Wt. Home Town
Bow Dempsey, Richard M. 18 6:4 185 Arlington, Va.
2 Renfree, Peter R. 19 6:3 190 New Bedford, Conn.
3 Hannemann, James 18 6:5 190 Eagle, Wisc.
4 Gembol, Michael P. 18 6:3 195 Columbus, Neb.
5 Barausky, James E. 19 6:5 200 Pawling, N. Y.
6 Blackledge, Peter D. 18 6:4 181 Houston, Tex.
7 Kolstad, Charles F. 18 6:3 182 Bakersfield, Calif.
Str. Burbage, Charles T. 20 6:4 200 McLean, Va.
Average 6:4 190
Cox. Craft, James P. III 18 5:7 130 Philadelphia, Pa.
Subs. Simmons, Eric C. 18 5:9 163 Arlington, Va.
Brixey, Stephen A. 18 6:2 195 McMinnville, Ore.
Coach: Louis W. Gellermann
FRESHMAN—(left to right): Robert James, Charles Burbage, Charles Kolstad, Peter Blackledge, James Barausky, Michael Gembol, Richard Dempsey, Eric Simmons, Stephen Brixey, Peter Renfree. Kneeling in front: James Craft.
NAVY
VARSITY
Pos. Name Class Age Ht. Wt. Home Town
Bow Denson, David '68 24 6:4 190 Roanoke, Va.
2 Mackenzie, Tom '70 19 6:4 190 Baltimore, Md.
3 Hannemann, Jim '69 20 6:5 190 Eagle, Wis.
4 Rowley, Dennis '68 23 6:4 210 Walnut Creek, Cal.
5 Miller, Stuart '70 19 6:4 205 Huron, Ohio
6 Blackledge, Peter '69 20 6:4 190 Houston, Tex.
7 Dempsey, Rich. '69 20 6:4 190 San Antonio, Tex.
Str. Saltenberger, Wm. '70 20 6:2 190 Medford Lakes, N.J.
Average 6:4 192
Cox. Prince, Robert '70 20 5:4 120 Ithaca, N.Y.
Subs. Hess, Mike '69 20 6:3 190 Newton, Mass.
Elliott, Charles '70 21 6:4 195 Kansas City, Mo.
Coach: Louis W. Gellermann Manager: D. P. Russell
VARSITY—(Left to Right): Bill Saltenberger, Rich Dempsey, John Collins, Stu Miller, Mike Malone, Mike Hess, Pete Blackledge, Jim Schwenk, (Kneeling): Bob Prince.
Navy Crew Letter Winners
Varsity Letter Winners & Four Year Squad Members of the Naval Academy's Oldest Intercollegiate Sport
Class of 1969
Heavyweights
Barausky, James E.
Blackledge, Peter D.
Collins, John P. (capt.)
Craft, James P., III
Dempsey, Richard M.
Gembol, Michael P.
Hannemann, James R.
Hess, Michael D.
Rush, Charles P.
Russell, David P., III
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
(Navysports.com)
6

Dad was so happy & excited at my success, and he became my biggest fan - even sending me encouraging telegrams before each race.



WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

D NSC122 PD=HOUSTON TEX 15 1115A CST=
MIDSHIPMAN P D BLACKLEDGE 69=
ROOM 2022 BANCROFT HALL ANNAPOLIS MD=

LETS SEE THAT POWER SEAT IN ENGINE ROOM TAKE LIKE BATMANS JET. ROW MAN ROW. GO NAVY GO
DAD

ANYWAY, BEAT PRINCETON !!

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

LIS N NON'''' WU001 NL PDF HOUSTON TEX 11
MIDSHIPMAN P D BLACKLEDGE 69
16 CO BANCROFT HALL USNA ANNAPOLIS MD

LETS MAKE PRINCETON AND MRS EARLES SON SAY UNCLE AM PROUD YOUR VARSITY SEAT HAVE MONEY SAYS YOU WIN CALL ME RESULTS ALL OF HOUSTON WITH YOU YEA NAVY
DAD

WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

312P EDT JUN 17 66 SYB160 DB050
D HSA595 NL PD HOUSTON TEX 17
MIDSHIPMAN P D BLACKLEDGE
NAVY CREWS BOAT HOUSE NEW YORK STATE FAIR GROUNDS SYRACUSE NY
AS GEORGE WASHINGTON SAID TO HIS CREW ON THE BANKS OF THE DELAWARE RIVER "GET IN THE BLANKETY-BLAK BOAT AND START ROWING"
DAD.

When Dad learned that I had won a treasured spot to race against the top rowing colleges in the nation at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships, my aging white-haired father flew all the way from Houston, Texas to Syracuse, New York to sit outside, in a driving rainstorm, in the weathered wooden bleacher stands at Lake Onondaga to watch me race. When my boat decisively won,

Dad somehow made his way through the crowds of IRA Officials, Newspaper and Magazine reporters, and congratulating fans and spectators - and we shared a mutually tearful and joyful embrace: Father and Son; United States Naval Academy Class of 1920 and United States Naval Academy Class of 1969; Champion Boxer and Champion Oarsman; Alpha and Omega. It was such a gift to have Dad there at the end of my victorious race to share all the accolades, and to have him embrace me while I was experiencing the most extraordinary, euphoric high of my life.

HONORING
THE USNA 1967 2V8 IRA
NATIONAL CHAMPION TEAM
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
(Sports Illustrated)
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
Spoils enroute to Crabtown lockers.
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
Navy coxswain heads for watery ceremonial.
USNA Navy Crew Honor: On 17 June 1967, in front of 15,000 crew fans, the 1967 USNA 2V8 dramatically & decisively won its IRA Regatta of 14 top rowing colleges— beating nearest competitor Penn by a full two lengths, and having even more open water on Wisconsin, Cornell, Washington, Syracuse, California, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Princeton, UCLA, Brown, Northeastern, and Stanford—bringing the Kennedy Challenge Trophy back to USNA for the fifth time in history. (Intercollegiate Rowing Association and Syracuse Herald-American)
(Peter Douglas Blackledge)
Penn's sweep of Regatta spoiled by Navy
(The New York Times, Syracuse Herald-American)
12
(Peter Douglas Blackledge)

And when I was presented my Championship Medal. I immediately conducted a crisp military turn and placed it gently in the hands of my surprised father, who had made it all possible. With tears of joy now streaming down each of our faces, my beaming father ecstatically hoisted my medal high in the air - just as he had hoisted me high in the air at the hospital on the first day of my life. Seeing my aging, white haired father so happy and bursting with pride nearly burst my own heart with joy.

Knowing that *Sports Illustrated* magazine took our picture as my teammates & I completed the ceremonial dunking of our victorious coxswain in Lake Onondaga, Dad tracked down that Sports Illustrated photographer, obtained a copy of that picture, framed it, and proudly put it on his wall.

When I graduated from the Naval Academy and began my career as a Naval Officer, Dad even came to visit me on my ship, and our similar surface-ship Naval careers provided one more unique bond between us. Although my Naval career took me all over the country, and halfway around the world, Dad and I always remained in close contact via phone calls, letters, and cassette tapes, as well as visits whenever possible. I enjoyed making our time together as memorable for him as he had for me, by always creating unique presents for him. In the year before Dad passed away, I flew to Houston to spend a full week with my then 85-year-old father and to take him a particularly special gift. Dad had always delighted in gifts which I made for him during my childhood Rio Vista Summer Camp days, remarking that gifts made by hand are particularly cherished as they come from the heart. And so I had researched the Navy ships in which Dad had served during his 34-year Naval career, and I wrote to the National Archives to obtain a picture of each. I then purchased, machined, and stained a large wood plaque, and mounted each of the pictures onto that plaque beneath a brass plate on which I had engraved "Captain Allan Blackledge, U.S. Navy, 34 Years Of Service With Honor and Distinction." Except when my Mother died, and that day of victory which we shared on Lake Onondaga, I had never seen Dad become so emotional - but he did that day, and we tearfully but joyfully embraced. Neither one of us knew that would be the last time we would see each other.

Dad subsequently entered the hospital for what was characterized as minor surgery. When his recovery from that surgery became extended, my siblings & I arranged to fly to Texas to celebrate Christmas with him. Wanting to continue my tradition of providing unique, personalized gifts for Dad during each of our visits, I made three particularly special presents for this occasion: (Gift # 1) I purchased a small Christmas tree, as well as five large heart-shaped ornaments, and affixed a picture of each of his five children to the five heart ornaments. At the top of the tree, I placed an angel ornament I made, onto which I had affixed a picture of Dad. At the base of the tree, I placed a wooden plaque which read "The Allan D. Blackledge Family (Christmas) Tree". My hope was that Dad would be able to gaze at that tree from his hospital bed and be heartened as he felt pride and joy in the five accomplished and loving children he had raised.

(Gift # 2) I made a set of large angel wings and a halo for each of us five siblings to wear when we entered Dad's hospital room, to portray Dad's frequent statement that the "Blackledge Angel" was always watching over us and protecting us;

(Gift # 3) I took my treasured Navy Varsity Heavyweight Crew Team racing jersey from its honored position on the wall of my home, split it down the back, and sewed additional matching blue-and-gold material to its base, making a hospital gown nightshirt which Dad could proudly wear - as he had been so very proud of my becoming a member of the distinguished United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Rowing Team.

Sadly, our planned time together was not to be. Only days before we five siblings were to arrive for our Christmas celebration, Dad suddenly and unexpectedly passed away. I was absolutely devastated. Dad had been my rock. While my much older siblings had each moved on to become spouses and parents, my primary identity remained as "My Father's Son." So I wanted to somehow create a special memorial for him. I knew that when a Navy Crew Racing Shell is taken out of its rack at the Naval Academy to practice or race, the oarsmen call out the name of that shell as they lift it onto their shoulders and carry it to the water. What better memorial than to have Dad's name called out each day, at his beloved Naval Academy, in the sport which he had encouraged his youngest child to pursue - as oarsmen lift his named racing shell onto their shoulders, just as Dad had once lifted me onto his shoulders? So I asked my four wonderful siblings to join me in donating a Navy Crew Racing Shell to the Naval Academy in Dad's name, and all four graciously joined me in that donation.

The Naval Academy held a special dedication & christening ceremony for the "CAPT ALLAN BLACKLEDGE" racing shell, complete with Naval Academy officials & photographers, in which all five of us Blackledge siblings participated. The Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Crew team subsequently rowed that shell to a decisive victory in the IRA National Championships. And years later, at the end of its long, illustrious racing career, the “CAPT ALLAN BLACKLEDGE” Navy Crew Racing Shell was retired and permanently mounted to the ceiling of the United States Naval Academy Varsity Crew Awards/Banquet Room, where it will continue to be honored in perpetuity.

In 2016, as my Naval Academy Class Of 1969 was making preparations for celebrating the 2019 50th Anniversary of our graduation, and my family was looking forward to celebrating the 2019 100th Anniversary of our father's Naval Academy Class Of 1920 graduation (Dad's United States Naval Academy Class of 1920 had graduated United States Naval Academy on June 6, 1919, exactly 50 years before our Class Of 1969, under a compressed three-year curriculum instituted due to World War I), I felt that a special moment had arrived. Accordingly, I withdrew funds from my Retirement Rainy Day savings to - on my own - donate a second Navy Crew Racing Shell to United States Naval Academy, in the Blackledge name. This Racing Shell would be the "PETER BLACKLEDGE, '69",

- my Omega Navy Crew Racing Shell to my Father's Alpha Navy Crew Racing Shell - thereby celebrating and completing the Blackledge line and the sacred connection which I had with my Dad. And so was fulfilled the culmination of our precious bond, and Circle Of Life - as the Father lifts up and supports his Son, so does the Son his Father. A promise made; a promise kept; a dream fulfilled. Thank you Dad, my Father and my Alpha, for all you were and are, for all you gave to me - and for helping me to Find My Omega.

A Fowl AbDUCKtion
In The State Of Texas:
Peter Tries To "Web-Enable"
His Girlfriend's House

Peter had his wonderfully fun and mischievous nature even in high school. The following is an experience which Peter related to me:

In perennially sunny and toasty Texas, we say we only have two seasons: Summer and February.

Therefore my formative Christmases were often wonderfully warm. When I was a Senior at Lamar High School in Houston, there was a girl named Sue in my class who absolutely LOVED ducks - constantly talking about them and even wearing duck-shaped jewelry pins. So, I decided to give her the ultimate Christmas present: a live duck! Armed with a loaf of Wonder Bread, I drove over

to Herman Park - which had a large pond richly inhabited by ducks. I treacherously began throwing out pieces of bread to the ducks, drawing them nearer & nearer to me with each toss, until one audacious duck came unwisely close - at which time I grabbed the hapless creature, ran with it to my car, threw it into the back seat, and started driving to Sue's house. What I had failed to consider was that ducks, when considerably upset, tend to dramatically evacuate their bowels. So, as I am furiously speeding down Houston streets to reach Sue's house, the duck is equally furiously flying about the inside of my car and ejecting remnants of everything it had eaten for the past two days. By the time I reached Sue's house, the inside of my beloved and previously immaculate '57 Chevy looked like a gang of brown paint-ballers had an indoor shoot-out. Chagrined but undaunted, I rushed to Sue's door carrying the wildly flapping and quacking creature - only to have the door answered by Sue's mother. She was not amused, and sternly ordered me to leave her house. But Sue suddenly appeared behind her, and Sue could not stop laughing uproariously at the sight of my standing in front of her mother while holding a furiously flapping duck. Having successfully made my unique Christmas present known to Sue, I drove back to Herman Park and released my feathery captive. He no doubt had a special PTSD story with which to regale his children and grand-ducks - about being plucked from his watery sanctuary by the Ted Bundy of Duckdom. Years later, I decided to do penance for my fowl transgression by prostrating myself at the webbed feet of the Texas Duck Civilization at a Christmas Family Reunion in front of my amazed young nieces and nephews, who couldn't stop laughing, and who even fifty years later continue to replace the usual Christmas stories with this anecdote of my "Quacking Up". Hence, a new Blackledge Story was born, illustrated by this picture of a vengeful gaggle of ducks doing their Nancy Sinatra impression on my chest.

Capturing The Wild Texas Armadillo
And
Terrorizing My Mother With It

By Peter Blackledge
A Wayward Texas Teenager

Peter wrote about this true experience from his misspent youth in Texas:

"When I was about 12 years old, growing up in Texas, the family across the street would often take me with them when they went to their ranch for the weekend. Their son Roddy & I were best friends - and we would go hunting with our .22 rifles in the thickly wooded areas which surrounded their ranch. I would proudly bring home the skins of rattlesnakes and copperheads which I shot there. One Saturday, Roddy & I saw a large armadillo (an animal indigenous & unique to Texas, which looks like a gigantic rat with a thick leathery shell, long claws, & beady red flashing eyes) – over a foot in length and weighing approximately 20 pounds - lumbering across the open ground in the distance. I decided to capture it, yelling to Roddy as I raced ahead. The armadillo apparently decided it couldn't outrun me, so it started digging into the ground (a primary armadillo defense). I grabbed the armadillo by its armored tail, but it was such an incredibly strong digger that it was literally pulling me down into the hole it was digging. Fortunately, Roddy grabbed onto me and was able to get his two large Labrador Retriever hunting dogs to start digging on either side of the armadillo. Among the four of us, we were finally able to extricate the recalcitrant armadillo from its refuge - and I hoisted it triumphantly into the air, as if from a scene of boyhood exuberance in "Lord Of The Flies." Somehow, I was able to talk my hosts into letting me take the armadillo home as a pet. When home, I put my new pet into a metal garbage can which my family kept in the garage - but I neglected to mention it to my parents. Our garage was adjacent to our house and was

where our washer and dryer were located. Later that day, my mother came out to the garage to do some laundry. Hearing a strange "thump-thump-thump" emanating from the metal garbage can (as the armadillo was furiously banging from side-to-side), my mother peered into the metal garbage can to see what was causing the racket. Seeing a pointy nose, sharp claws, with two flashing red eyes staring back at her, she let out a scream which could be heard two blocks away. Once her seemingly endless screaming had subsided, and my father had managed to peel her off the ceiling, I was sternly ordered to "Get rid of that creature." So, I dutifully evicted my armadillo from the metal-garbage-can-condominium which I had secured for him, transported him to some nearby woods, and tearfully waved goodbye as he hastily trundled off into his new environment. He no doubt needed time to recover from his PTSD, but I am sure he became quite the celebrity to his new forest-mates, regaling them with the tale of his capture and incarceration by two-legged aliens. Perhaps his story even made the front page of the Armadillo Enquirer???"

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A Visit From

Philo McGiffin

United States Naval Academy

Class of 1884

To

Peter Blackledge

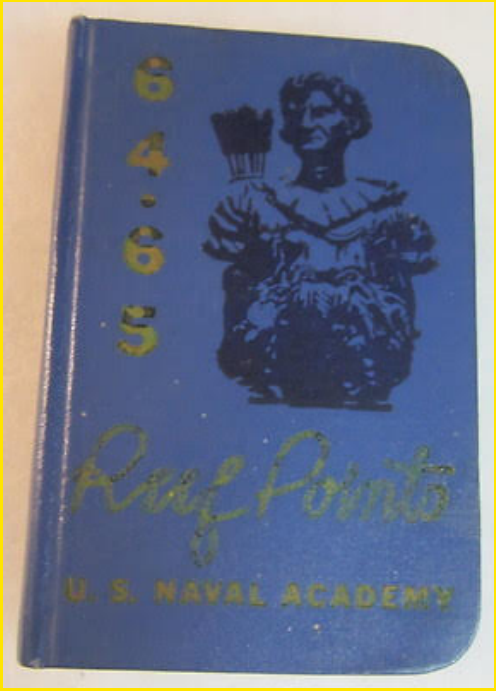
United States Naval Academy

Class of 1969

Caution: Peter Blackledge wrote this parody only for his fellow United States Naval Academy graduates. Anyone who does not have a Mermaid as their mother, and King Neptune as their father, and who was not Born On The Crest Of A Wave and was not Rocked In The Cradle Of The Deep, and who does not have Seaweed and Barnacles as their clothes, and whose every tooth is not a Marlinspike, and whose hair is not Hemp, and whose bones are not Spars, and who doesn't spit Tar, and who most importantly cannot answer the critical questions of "How's The Cow", "Why Didn't You Say Sir", and "What Time Is It" will not be able to understand this erudite academic treatise of nautical expositions.

Authored by Peter Blackledge, Of The Great Class Of 1969, United States Naval Academy: Demonstrably The Last United States Naval Academy Class To Have A Plebe Year

I received a very strange visit last night. A guy showed up at my door, saying he was looking for someone named “Garcia”. He was out of breath, and seemed very distraught that the message which he was carrying had been delayed in its delivery - and he kept mumbling something about “Time, Tide, and Formation” while checking his “Chronometer” and lamenting that it was not “In Accordance With The Great Sidereal Movement With Which Time Is Generally Reconned”. At first I thought he might be a wacky AMWAY salesman or a Seventh Day Adventist. When I asked him “What’s up?”, he strangely kept referring to his bayonet belt buckle. I was initially entranced by his stories of “The Surly Days Of Old Serbia”, and his spellbinding “Parable Of The Walking, Talking Cow” (which inexplicably had become Full Of Chalk), and I was impressed by his distinguished Nautical parentage and his detailed knowledge of menu items - and I felt honored that he continually addressed me as a Senior Cirripede. But when he handed me this very strange, weathered booklet,



it seemed oddly and dangerously familiar to me, eliciting my terrible, long-repressed memories.

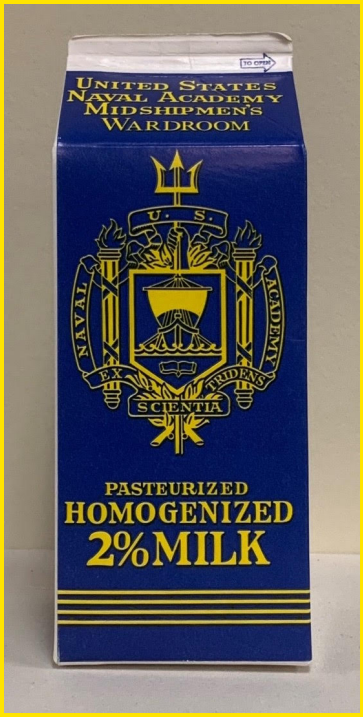
What concerned me most about him was his clothing of Seaweed and Barnacles, and his spitting Tar all over my Living Room. I feel that this dude definitely needs to see a dentist and a barber - having Marlinspikes for teeth and Hemp for hair is definitely not going to help his social life.

I finally learned that this person's name was Philo McGiffin, United States Naval Academy Class of 1884, and I vividly recalled that legendary name from my own Plebe year at United States Naval Academy. Our discussions that night actually became very cordial and informative. We agreed that the unique information which Midshipmen at United States Naval Academy (USNA) are cordially invited to learn during their Plebe Year - both from that strangely and disturbingly familiar booklet titled "Reef Points" which he clasped tightly in right hand, and from the wonderful brotherly guidance which USNA upperclassmen are so kind as to impart to us lowly Plebes - were critical not only to our distinguished careers as Naval Officers but also in our exalted position as Society Intellectuals leading our families and our Nation. This was aptly demonstrated as Philo and I embarked on a series of deeply cerebral discussions covering a broad range of topics and issues which are as critical today as they were for my Plebe Year over a half century ago, my father's Plebe Year over a century ago, and Philo's Plebe almost a century and a half ago, as exemplified in our following exchanges:

- **International Relations With China**: Does "How Long" actually refer to "The Length Of The USNA Mess Hall", or is it "The Name Of A Chinaman"?
- **Architecture**: Are there really 489 panes of glass in the Memorial Hall Ceiling?
- **Entertainment:** Is going to an Upperclassman's room to "Hang Around And Listen To Music" a favorite pastime of USNA Plebes?
- **Motion Pictures**: What really are "The Current Movies In Town", and what's the status of the "Star Theater"?
- **Courtesy and Proper Comportment**: "Why Don't Some Plebes Say 'Sir'"?
- **Nutrition and Cuisine**: Is a meal of "Scuba Steak", "Philadelphia Scrapple" and "Cannonballs & Hard Sauce", truly the optimal nutritional regimen, covering all Major Food Groups? And is "Whammo" the preferred method of their consumption, or does "Two Chews And A Swallow" still govern?
- **Career Planning**: Is "Bagging It" as a Plebe a leading indicator that person will end up "Bagging It" in a low-cost grocery store for their future career?
- **Inter-Service Commonalities**: Is it true that "Pre-Digested Food" (you can fill in that blank) "On A Shingle" was served at both USNA and United States Military Academy, or was it only an Army delectable delight?

- **Clothing Accessories**: Should "The Well-Dressed Man" be accomplished in "Furling & Stowing" his necktie? And does "Gentleman's Quarterly" magazine actually cite "Spiffys" as a vital clothing accessory?
- **Fine Dining**: Is "Steerage" actually listed among "World's Finest Restaurants"?
- **National Defense**: Is watching "Submarine Races" a contribution which every Midshipman and his Drag should do to support our nation's Armed Forces?

- **The Unknown**: What exactly are “MOCs”?
- **Animal Husbandry**: Is participating in a “Snake Ranch” critical to perpetuating the species?
- **Archeology**: Were the USNA’69-observed “Diggers & Fillers” actually Precision Archeologists?
- **Political Correctness**: Is it PC for an upperclassman to brace up a plebe, and tell him “I want to see more chins than a Chinese phone book”?
- **Aeronautics**: Is it true that the Belvedere Motel across from the gate at PAX is an official Launching Pad for Navy Aviators, and the Cow atop Belvedere is the original “Cow Who Walked And Talked And Full Of Chalk?”
- **Romance**: Does a Midshipman’s True Love truly feel impressed, enthralled, and complimented when referred to as his “Grease Girl” ?
- **Honorary Degrees**: is it true that the most academically accomplished Midshipmen are recognized and honored for their achievements by being awarded a unique entry on their USNA Permanent Record entitled “Class A” ?
- **Leading Indicators**: Does a “Smile” in your “Cover” mean you are Happy, or just that you’re ROTC?
- **Guinness Book of World Records**: We discussed the World Record-holders for key events: “How many pennies did you sweat to the wall”; “How many times did you swim to Baltimore”; “How many times did you "shove out””?
- **Investigating The Unknown**: Who is “Moaning Maggie”, and what really is in a Cruise Box?
- **Health:** in consideration of medical professionals advising a “Low Sodium Diet”, should Midshipmen.no longer endeavor to be “Salty”?
- **International Law**: Are “The Laws Of The Siberian Salt Mines” the most appropriate foundation for International Law, or are they only the best foundation for building Class Spirit and Camaraderie?
- **Appearances**: Is it true that the robust application of Brasso makes everything look better?
- **Truth In Labeling**: Is it true that “The Lacteal Fluid Extracted From A Female Of The Bovine Species” contains Chalk - a Level 3 Carcinogen - and therefore should carry an appropriate Warning label?



- **Flight & Submarine Training**: Are Plebe "Carrier Landings" and "Request Permission To Dive" critical training to become a Navy Pilot or Submariner?
- **Dating Etiquette**: Should Midshipmen continue to walk their dates between the two "Virgin Cannons" even though those cannons never seem to fire?
- **Irony**: If Kim Kardashian were to walk between "The Virgin Cannons", would those Cannons really fall over laughing?
- **Riddles**: If a person can't "Find A Way", can they still "Make One"?
- **Medical Research**: Is "Jimmy Legs" a critical medical condition, being actively researched?
- **Marital Relations**: Is "I'll Find Out, Sir" really the best response to say to your wife when she asks why you forgot your wedding anniversary?
- **Public Hygiene**: Is it acceptable to spit on one's shoes in order to impress the OOW with the resultant glossy shine?
- **High Fashion**: Will "Boon Docks" ever become Fashion Forward? And are "White Works" a favorite Summer Attire for Fashionistas of the elite Sailing Community?
- **Nautical Training**: Is "Eyes In The Boat" an integral part is Sailing Protocol?
- **Monetary Policy**: Is it financially prudent to invest a Silver Quarter in a "Bounce Test" to ensure that one's rack has been made tightly enough?
- **Medical Research**: Is "Podunk" really part of the female anatomy?
- **Plumbing**: Are Shower Shoes really the best instrument with which a Midshipman should attempt to beat his excrement through the shower drain?
- **Dialogue & Debate**: is the best response to every statement to loudly yell "Beat Army!!!"?
- **Efficiency**: Is it true that "Uniform Races" were derived from watching Superman change in a pay phone booth?
- **Sports**: Should "Greyhound Races", wearing "Jocks, Socks, Boondocks, & Carrying Lockbox", assume Professional Sports status?
- **Personal Behavior versus Dining Etiquette**: How often should a Midshipman masticate?
- **Literature**: Should all the "Dear John" letters received by plebes from their high school girlfriends be bound in a Blue & Gold cover and enshrined in the Smithsonian?
- **Attire Machinations**: Should "Picking Up The Blues" be made mandatory for all college students?
- **Cultured Dinner Conversation**: Does the Toastmasters Organization endorse the practice of interrupting one's meal to suddenly jump up and yell "Beat Army!!!"?

- **Ripley's Believe It Or Not**: Should new categories be established for "Most Times Gone Over The Wall" and "Fastest Land Speed Record By An Escaped Midshipman In A Corvette, Between USNA and "The Tombs" in Georgetown, And Return"?
- **Academic Excellence**: Should "The Late Lights Club" be recognized as a premier embodiment of academic achievement?
- **Electrical Engineering**: Is a "Plebe Thermocouple" truly instrumental to the advance of EE?
- **History's Mysteries**: "What ever happened to the roughest meanest SOB that ever stoked a Navy boiler?"
- **Duty and Responsibility**: Should "ICOR Duty" be fully recognized and supported as a patriotic reason that a Midshipman cannot attend an onerous event?
- **National Bird Symbol**: Should the USA Eagle be replaced by "The Birds Of The Air"?
- **Communication**: Should "Tell The World" be established as the primary mode of conveying important information?
- **Exercise**: Should "Bracing Up" and "Shoving Out" be adopted by The President's Council On Physical Fitness as the most highly recommended exercises for all Americans?
- **Public Law**: Should "The Laws Of The Navy" be enshrined in Public Law, and "Sea Lawyers" be able to charge their time as Billable Hours?
- **Meteorology**: Is it truly a valid test of "How Cold Is It" is by assessing "The Knob On An Outhouse Door" and "The Heart Of A Baltimore ..... young lady", or by the temperature of "A Pile Of Penguin ..... excrement" and the "Nipples Of A Witches T@t?
- **Social Graces**: Should a Drunken Sailor truly be given the opportunity to have Carnal Knowledge of The Captain's Daughter?
- **Unanswerable Questions**: Who was HC Harry?
- **Justice**: If a Plebe is found to have a loose thread hanging from his uniform, should he be required to perform "Irish Penance"
- **Academy Awards**: Is it true that "Victory At Sea" has won more Oscars than any other movie sequels?

While these bonding discussions made Philo and me feel very comfortable together, I unfortunately and inadvertently made two major mistakes with him:

1. During our discussions, Philo told me that he was very hungry from his extensive travels in search of García, and he asked if I had any bread. So I turned to my friends who were visiting with me at the time, and I innocently asked them "Does anyone

have any dinner rolls for Philo McGiffin?" Philo instinctively ducked under the table, expecting a barrage of baked missiles.

2. Philo told me he had largely been out of touch with current events, and he asked if I had any news which I could share with him. Knowing of the sad demise of Monty Python star Terry Jones, I - again innocently - succinctly replied to him "Jones is dead" - whereupon Philo suddenly and without warning crashed down his huge fist on my prized glass coffee table, shattering it, as he screamed "NO BY GOD!!!!"

END OF EXPERIENCE: When Philo was leaving, I innocently invited him to again in the future "Come around". Apparently those two words are very traumatic for Philo, with his following reaction as he quickly departed:

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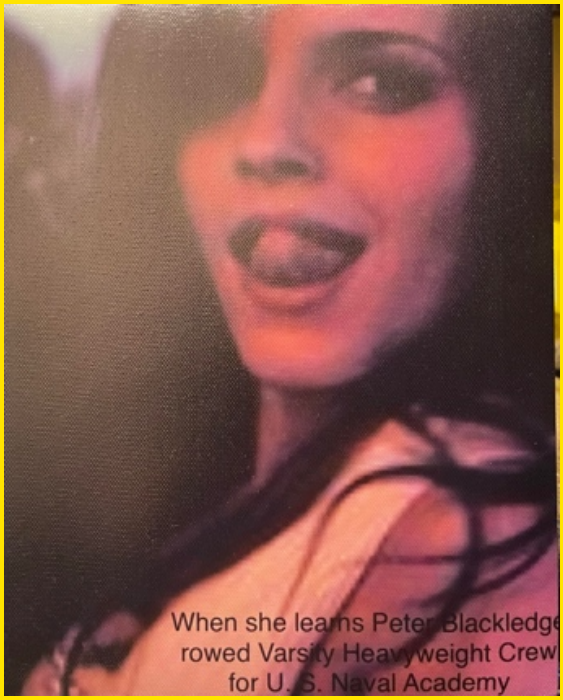
The Irresistible Allure Of United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsmen

Whimsically Written By United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman Peter Blackledge, In Symphony With ChatGPT, And Dedicated To Peter's Fellow Rugged, Ripped, Chiseled, Charismatic, Adonis Rowing Teammates – Who Innately Cause The Hearts Of Their Many Adoring And Swooning Female Rowing Groupies To Beat Faster And Their Breaths To Come More Rapidly In Passionate Fantasies. Whether This Is A Fictional Parody, Or A Factual Documentary Which Each Of Peter's Fellow Oarsmen Has Personally Experienced, Only They Know.



They noticed you before they knew your name.

It was something in the way you moved - upright posture, measured confidence, the quiet power of someone disciplined by long, hard rows and the intensity of competition. Whether at receptions at the Naval Academy Club, dances in Smoke Hall, or casual gatherings in Dahlgren Hall, you didn't speak loudly. You didn't need to try. People simply turned when you entered a room.

And beautiful women would invariably approach you with warm intent. Conversation would start easily enough.

" So," said one, tilting her head slightly, "what keeps you busy at the Academy?"

You never led with it. You never had to. But when it came out - almost offhandedly - that you rowed Varsity Heavyweight Crew, something shifted.

The effect was immediate, though she tried not to show it. Her breath suddenly caught. Her eyes widened and lingered a moment longer. Her lips parted and softened. The corner of her mouth curved into a slow smile, and her tongue involuntarily moistened her pouty red lips. Her thoughts were suddenly taken to predawn hours on the Severn, the mist rising off the water, the synchronized strength and grace of eight powerful bodies moving as one, beads of perspiration forming on chiseled muscularity like diamonds. A symphony of strength. It was an intoxicating vision.

One woman softly said, "That explains it," as if a puzzle had finally snapped into place.

The first women's eyes lifted to you - again lingering, as if something she'd already sensed was now drawing her closer.

"Yes, that explains the beautiful height, the serene calm, the powerful presence " the first woman said. "And the broad shoulders."

She asked about the water at dawn, about the rhythm of the boat, about what it feels like when eight people move perfectly together. She leaned in closer as you spoke, her eyes not leaving yours, listening in a way that felt personal, her attention steady, her body angled toward yours. You could smell her delicate perfume, feel the warmth of her presence. Her hand brushed your arm once - brief, accidental in theory, deliberate in practice.

She found herself helplessly drawn to you. Because power that is forged in the crucible of rowing - in the disciplined sacrifice of waking up every day and choosing effort over comfort - radiates its own gravity. Because when a man learns to move perfectly aligned with others, to suffer quietly, to win without spectacle, something in the watching heart answers. And a woman's desire blooms in the space left untouched.

Around the room, other women noticed too. Not overtly. Just glances held a beat longer than necessary - curious, appreciative, undeniably interested. The attraction was quiet, but strong, and unmistakable. They had come to know what women have understood for the one hundred and fifty years of United States Naval Academy Heavyweight oarsmen:

There's a visceral pull to a United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman that women feel before it's even conscious. It's the way physical power is paired with restraint - strength that doesn't need to announce itself. Long hours on the water build not just muscle, but heat expressed in endurance, stamina, and a body tuned to rhythm and drive. That combination awakens a very real, very instinctive desire.

Women are sensually drawn to men whose bodies tell a story of effort and capability. An oarsman's physique is earned through repetition and pain, and it carries an unmistakable seductiveness. Broad backs, powerful legs, forearms hardened by the oar - everything about an

oarsman suggests intensity held just beneath the surface. There's an implicit promise in that kind of physicality: strength that can protect, stamina that doesn't fade, and presence that fills a room without trying.

Just as potent is the confidence that comes from mastery. USNA oarsmen are accustomed to pushing past limits, to operating while exhausted, to staying composed under pressure. That self-command translates directly into a provocative appeal. Calm eyes, steady voice, unhurried movements - signals that he knows exactly who he is and what he can do. Desire thrives in that certainty.

Add to that the intimacy of rhythm and teamwork. Rowing is deeply physical and synchronized, eight bodies moving as one, breath and motion aligned. It trains an awareness of timing, connection, and responsiveness - qualities women find intensely attractive on a primal level.

In the end, sensual attraction to a Naval Academy heavyweight oarsman is ignited by an oarsman's contained power, earned dominance, and controlled intensity - a man forged by discipline, driven by purpose, and comfortable in his own strength. For many women, that combination doesn't just spark interest. It arouses desire. It's the Hubbard Hall aphrodisiac which makes United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight oarsmen irresistible.

Olympic Gold Medal Rowing Tradition Of United States Naval Academy

Written By United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight
Oarsman Peter Blackledge, In Symphony With ChatGPT

1920 Antwerp Olympic Gold Medal

1952 Helsinki Olympic Gold Medal

In 1965, I began my four year Varsity Heavyweight rowing career with United States Naval Academy. I felt it was an extraordinary honor and privilege to become part of the Naval Academy's proud Olympic Gold Medal tradition, and I was ecstatic when the Naval Academy's extraordinary rowing program in two years turned me - a skinny and athletically undistinguished kid from Texas who knew nothing about rowing and had never before seen a Racing Shell - into an Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Champion.

That is the amazing history of the Naval Academy's rowing program: to miraculously turn undistinguished non-rowers into champions. It happened with my father's United States Naval Academy (USNA) Class of 1920, in which the Naval Academy turned Midshipman who were mostly of modest means and land-locked states into rowing legends who not only defeated the formidable Ivy League crews on their path to the Men's Eight Gold Medal at the VII Olympiad in Antwerp, Belgium, but also dramatically drove past the long-reigning British in the last 500 meters of the Olympic finals. That historic win broke an accepted stereotype that rowing was only for the elite. That USNA Eight also broke the Olympic and World record, with a time of 6:02.6—seven seconds faster than the record set at the 1912 Olympics. The achievement is considered a watershed event not only in the sport of rowing, but also in broader Olympic History. Beginning with that Gold Medal in 1920, USNA Crew set a precedent that led to the longest winning streak in a single sport in Olympic History.

This remarkable phenomenon was repeated with the 1952 Naval Academy Varsity Men's Eight, dubbed by *Time Magazine* to be "The Great Eight." That team was undefeated in its 1952 season before winning the Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Championships and then the U. S. Olympic Trials In Helsinki, Finland. The "Great Eight" went on to defeat the Soviet Union to win the Naval Academy's second Olympic Gold Medal. That Naval Academy Varsity Eight Crew remained unbeaten in both 1953 and 1954, winning 23 consecutive collegiate races and two consecutive Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Championships. It is considered by many to be the best Varsity Eight team to ever row. The challenges and triumphs of "The Great Eight" are beautifully chronicled in this documentary video.

https://youtu.be/BkVbhLIhqbI

My purpose in writing this special Novella is to highlight and honor the amazing Olympic Gold Rowing Tradition of my beloved Alma Mater: the United States Naval Academy.

The United States Naval Academy has never trained athletes merely to win races. It has trained men to hold a line, to keep time under pressure, and to move forward when fatigue argues otherwise. Twice in the twentieth century, that philosophy carried American shells to Olympic gold—first in the uneasy peace after the First World War, and again in the tense dawn of the Cold War.

Those victories belong to history as the triumphs of two legendary crews: the 1920 "Admirals" and the 1952 "Great Eight."

They rowed a generation apart.
They raced in different waters.
They were shaped by the same code.

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Antwerp, 1920 — The "Admirals"

When the Olympic Games reconvened in 1920, the world was still recovering from catastrophe. Europe bore the scars of war, and the Games themselves were an act of resolve—proof that nations could meet again in peaceful competition.

The American eight that arrived in Antwerp was composed of men from the United States Naval Academy, midshipmen and officers whose rowing had been forged alongside military discipline. Their bearing was unmistakable. Observers noted their posture before they ever touched the oars: composed, quiet, exact.

They became known as the "Admirals."

The nickname reflected neither rank nor arrogance, but authority—men accustomed to responsibility, to operating as a unit without theatrics. On the water, their shell moved with restrained power. Every stroke was measured. There was no wasted motion, no panic when challenged.

The race itself was decisive. While European crews surged and faded, the Admirals held a relentless pace, their timing unbroken. Blades entered water as one. Legs drove together. The boat ran long and clean.

When they crossed the finish line first, the victory felt inevitable rather than explosive. Gold medals were awarded to a crew that had not come to make a statement—but had made one all the same.

American rowing, guided by naval discipline, had claimed its place on the world stage.

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Helsinki, 1952 — The “Great Eight”

Thirty-two years later, the Olympic regatta unfolded in a far different world. The Second World War had ended, but peace was brittle. In Helsinki, the Cold War hovered beneath every flag and every anthem.

The United States Naval Academy once again sent an eight to represent the nation—men trained not only in strength, but in precision and endurance under strain. This crew would earn a name that followed them into legend:

the “Great Eight.”

What distinguished them was not bravado, but synchronization. Coaches and competitors alike remarked that the shell appeared to move independently of effort, as though momentum itself were being commanded. Their stroke was long, fluid, exacting. Their recovery silent.

In the Olympic final, the opening pace was punishing. International rivals pressed hard, hoping to fracture the Americans early. The Great Eight did not respond with desperation. They trusted their rhythm.

Midway through the course, the difference emerged. Other boats began to shorten their strokes. The Naval Academy shell did not. With each drive, it gained inches—then feet—then open water.

The final sprint was not chaotic. It was controlled, almost austere. When the Americans crossed the line, the outcome was beyond dispute.

Gold again belonged to a Naval Academy crew—this time not as a symbol of postwar recovery, but as a demonstration of composure and mastery in an age of tension.

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A Single Line Through Time

The Admirals of 1920 and the Great Eight of 1952 never shared a boathouse. Yet they were shaped by the same institutional truths:

- That unity outweighs raw strength
- That discipline endures longer than enthusiasm
- That leadership is proven by consistency under strain

Neither crew depended on a single star. Their power came from alignment—physical, mental, and moral.

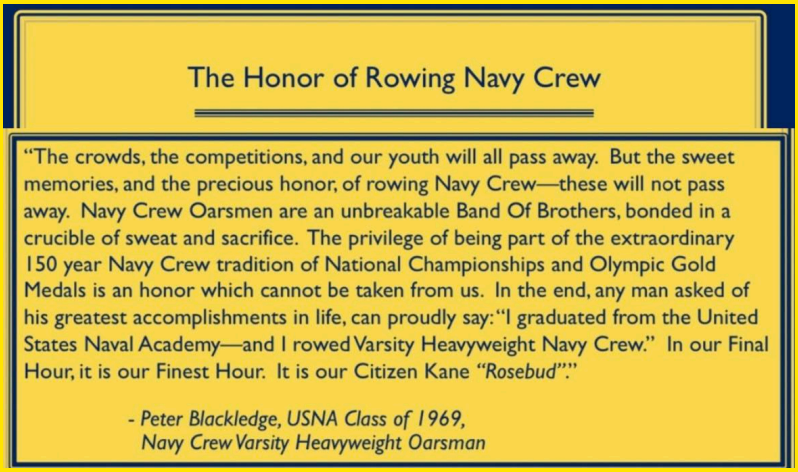
Together, they form a continuous line in American rowing history, one drawn from the banks of the Severn River to Olympic waters abroad. They remind us that the Naval Academy's contribution to sport has never been accidental. It is the byproduct of a culture that values timing, trust, and shared burden.

For six minutes at a time, separated by decades, eight men moved as one—and carried the weight of a nation with quiet authority.

The water has closed over their wakes.

The legacy remains.

On the occasion of the United States Naval Academy's 2019 dedication, christening, and launch of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell on the 150th Anniversary of the Navy Crew program, I was so deeply inspired by both the Naval Academy's hallowed rowing tradition and my own extraordinary experience rowing Varsity Heavyweight Crew for the Naval Academy that I authored this personal tribute of honor:



The Honor of Rowing Navy Crew

"The crowds, the competitions, and our youth will all pass away. But the sweet memories, and the precious honor, of rowing Navy Crew—these will not pass away. Navy Crew Oarsmen are an unbreakable Band Of Brothers, bonded in a crucible of sweat and sacrifice. The privilege of being part of the extraordinary 150 year Navy Crew tradition of National Championships and Olympic Gold Medals is an honor which cannot be taken from us. In the end, any man asked of his greatest accomplishments in life, can proudly say: "I graduated from the United States Naval Academy—and I rowed Varsity Heavyweight Navy Crew." In our Final Hour, it is our Finest Hour. It is our Citizen Kane *"Rosebud"*."

- Peter Blackledge, USNA Class of 1969,
Navy Crew Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman

Requiem
For
America's Last Cicada

A sorrowful eulogy, by Peter Blackledge of BugMax News, on the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the passing away of Cecelia Cicada ——– America's last surviving Cicada of 2021. Cecelia was sadly the only Cicada unable to find a mate among the billions of Conjugal Cicadas. This is the tragic tale of Cecelia's destiny unattained and her dreams unfulfilled.

Dearly Beloved,

We are gathered here today to honor the memory of our dearly departed Cecilia Cicada, who sadly passed away last night.

Those of you who were not blessed to know Cecilia Cicada may be asking: "Why - of the hundreds of billions of Cicadas which were suddenly filling our trees and lawns and driveways in the Spring and Summer of 2021 - should the death of one Cicada matter to us?" It's because Cecelia was the last 2021 American Cicada to pass away, and tragically the only 2021 Cicada who died without having mated, thereby having her one dream - for which she had waited seventeen years - go unfulfilled. Despite her having been constantly surrounded by sexually obsessed male Cicadas, in a Sea Of Pulsating Procreation, Cecilia last night sadly entered Cicada Heaven in true Madonna fashion: "Like A Virgin".

But it wasn't supposed to be that way. Like so many of her fellow Cicadas, Cecilia started her life full of hope and promise. She came from good ground, descended from a respected family tree, and seemed to have everything going for her. But, when the chirping stopped, Cecilia was the only Cicada not to be blessed with a chair at the Mating Table. As all the other sensually-spent Cicadas around Cecelia were basking in the afterglow of their "Afternoon Delight" - lying on their backs in the cool Summer grass, sharing a post-coital cigarette with their mating partners - Cecilia was alone, frustrated, and sad.

In the end, Cecilia was racked with terrible questions and self-doubts. What would she tell her Mother, whose hope for Grandchildren Cicadas was now dashed? And could she ever recover from the terrible mocking which she had received from all of the promiscuous female Cicadas - who had forced her to wear that onerous "Tim Tebow Virgin Ring" on her wing, and insultingly referred to her as "Celibate Cecilia"?

Cecilia asked herself: Why did this terrible fate befall her? Had she set her Cicada Mate Standards too high? Should she have settled for that off-key chirping male Cicada next to her, who had lost one leg to a Praying Mantis? Had her Tinder dating profile really been so terrible that 100 billion Cicadas all "swiped left" on her? Knowing that males often prefer younger mates, should she have lied on her Tinder profile - saying that she was 16 instead of 17? Should she have gotten Bug Botox injections? Should she have had that Brazilian Bug Lift? Should she have used a Photo Filter App for her posted IChirp picture? Should she have misleadingly posted online an old photo from her young and nubile Nymph days? Should she have gone on that austere "Auchenorrhyncha Diet", and dropped a few milligrams? Should she have joined her neighborhood "17 Year Fitness" gym and gotten into better shape? Should she have agreed to cosmetic surgery to correct her protruding "Lazy Compound Eye"? Should she have enticingly shown some inner wing in her Tinder profile photo? Should she have joined that "Single Cicadas Meetup" group in the next tree? Should she have "Given it Up" to Player Cicada, when he was hitting on her with those same old pickup lines ("You must be tired, Baby, because you've been running through my mind all day", and "I hope you weren't hurt when you fell from Heaven, my Angel Auchenorrhyncha"), while flashing his gold chains and wearing that disgusting "So Many Cicadas; So Little Time" t-shirt? If she had managed to overlook Player Cicada's obvious comb-over and his sap-belly, and pretended to have fallen prey to his brazenly displayed hairy chest, she could be a mother right now!

Or maybe she should have updated her fashion and her conversation skills since her last outing 17 years ago - instead of wearing those 2004 Low-Rise Cargo Pants, DIY T-Shirt, Paperboy Hat, and Ugg Boots, and raving about the latest Britney Spears and Nickelback songs. All of these misgivings now unfortunately followed Cecilia to her Cicada grave, as she was the only casualty of the otherwise highly successful 2021 Cicada Sexual Revolution and Summer Of Love.

As the full magnitude of her tragedy finally set in, its awful reality was truly painful: Like all other Cicadas - and most middle-aged American married men - Cecilia was only allowed sex once every 17 years. While her Cicada cousins in China were celebrating now being able to have three nymphs instead of two, Cecilia couldn't have even one. Her time was now passed. And she didn't even have the emotional release of being able to plaintively chirp all those Taylor Swift and Olivia Rodrigo post-coitus breakup songs she had been practicing. Cecilia felt particularly humiliated

when The Cicada Community forced her to wear the Scarlet “S”, to publicly shame her for being a Spinster. But, despite her many humiliations and sadnesses, Cecilia was strong and stalwart to the end - eschewing the easy song refrain of “It’s My Predation, And I’ll Cry If I Want To” for the more stoic musical hook of “Big Girl Cicadas Don’t Cry”.

And so, on the occasion of today’s Requiem Remembrance, I ask that you open your hearts to thoughts of Cecelia Cicada. Though the constant chirping of her colleague Cicadas has ceased, please don’t let the sad life of Cecilia Cicada go unremembered. She was truly the Brooding Psocoptera Protagonist of a 2021 Shakespearean Tragedy, surrounded by Copiously Copulating Cicada players, all strutting and fretting their hour upon the stage, full of chirping sound and fury, signifying nothing, then heard no more.

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Ringing The Bell:

Celebrating My Beloved Sister's

Victory Over Her Second Cancer

By Peter Blackledge

April 8, 2004, my beloved sister Patti was completing her second set of grueling Cancer radiation treatments due to her Cancer recurrence. Patti sent the following typically positive email to me and the family:

"Tomorrow, April 9, at about 10:15am, I shall become a real ringer: bell that is. This wonderful place has a "ship's bell" (like our Dad did from his Navy days, for calling us kids home) donated by a former patient, mounted on a plaque, just before the exit door - with a little poem declaring that the purpose of the bell is for each patient, upon finishing up his/her radiation treatment, to clang 3 times announcing that fact. So, on hearing the bell clang behind the door, the entire waiting room of radiation patients stands and cheers as the door opens to a smiling radiation-completed patient. Dick is coming to record that special person, who shall be me on this special day otherwise as well (136th birthday with twin Penny). Then, on the 16th, I shall emerge from my radical radiation cocoon to daylight and normal life. Life is good, and I am thankful. - Patricia, soon to be butterfly."

To further celebrate Patti's second triumph over Cancer, I located a brass "ships bell" similar to the one which Patti rang at the radiation treatment facility, and had that bell and a brass plate mounted on a custom wooden plaque, and had the brass plate inscribed with her email words, and the image of a butterfly, and my following tribute to Patti:

"To My Beloved Sister Patti;
Who humbled me as a child, by winning races across our front lawn;
And who now humbles me as an adult, with her optimism, courage, and grace;
Please accept this Butterfly Bell,
to mark your greatest victory;
Knowing that Mother
is smiling down, And Dad is saying
"I'm proud of you, Patti-Girl."
— Your Admiring Littlest Brother, Peter"

The Longest Goodbye:

The Loss Of My Beloved Sister

To Alzheimer's Disease

By Peter Douglas Blackledge

"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."

-Winnie The Pooh-

When I was growing up, my big sister Patti would softly read to me from my favorite books. Our mother had emotionally departed from the family, but Patti's reading to me was sweet salve to the pain I felt by my mother's abandonment. My favorite books were the "Winnie-The-Pooh" stories. As Patti read each story to me, she would often depart from the written text to wonderfully inhabit each of the story character's personas. I was delighted to hear the cheerful voices of Winnie-The-Pooh, Christopher Robin, Tigger, Piglet, Eeyore, Kanga, Roo, Rabbit, and Owl speaking directly to me. Suddenly, my pain of abandonment was gone, and our house would ring with the joyous laughter which only a young child can bring. Years later, I would repay Patti's kindness by similarly performing our personal play for Patti's young child Alexander, as Patti read to him from those same stories. Just as that simple sharing had created my special enduring bond of love with Patti, so has it done for Patti's son and me. It was but one example of how Patti's gifts of love would in turn generate additional love gifts. Patti was the benefactor to all of us who were blessed to know her, with this beautiful multiplication of her endless love

A precious present which our mother had provided before her death was to call each of us five siblings "bunnies". Patti particularly adopted that nomenclature for me, and thereby created for me her own application of the Southern practice of double first names. No longer would I be "Peter"; my new identity was now permanently "Peter-Bunny" or her abbreviated nickname for

me of "Bun." Although some may feel that such a name change is trivial, it was for me reminiscent of the Biblical accounts of Jacob's renaming to "Israel" and Saul's renaming to "Paul". Suddenly, I felt specially anointed by the big sister, whom I worshipped. Despite Alzheimer's relentless ravages of Patti's mind in her later life, it never managed to wrestle away that charming nickname with which Patti would always cheerfully address me, even to her death. In Patti's final days, when FaceTime would allow me to enter Patti's "memory facility" residence despite the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I would brace myself for what I knew would be the painful sight of my previously active, vibrant, marathon-runner sister now moribund and sadly slumped forward in her wheelchair. But her hearing my voice would miraculously raise Patti Lazarus-like, momentarily resurrecting her previous happy, healthy countenance and her always cheerful greeting of "Hi Bun!!!!". It was those brief moments of sweet, shared joy which kept me coming back, even amidst Patti's darkest days of Alzheimer's.

I observed in Patti that Alzheimer's coldly creates a distance, from the far-away look that now inhabited Patti's eyes to Patti's feeling of isolation. I wanted to help somehow. I had read that Alzheimer's patients respond to personal gifts, particularly if the gift is fun or even silly and reminds them of their life achievements. So I started "Love Bombing" Patti with silly, fun gifts: "Rosie The Riveter" socks, to symbolize Patti's foundation of strength; a Rice University ball cap to remind Patti of her college "Glory Days" and because our father would always smilingly say to us "Keep your hat on, so I'll know you"; a set of Bunny Ears, in memory of our mother calling each of us five siblings "Bunnies" and particularly in appreciation to Patti for the cherished name of "Peter-Bunny" which she had bestowed upon me. I sent the following Gift Note with the Bunny Ears:

"For My Sweet Sister Patti-Bunny, from your family hutch-mate Peter-Bunny. Please keep your ears on so I'll know you!!!! - With Soft Downy Fur Love, Peter-Bunny".

Next I sent a wooden music box, inscribed as follows:

"The Perfect Sister is kind, giving, and humorous. She is there when you need a shoulder to lean on. She loves you for who you are in good times...and the less than perfect times you have. I know this is true. I have that Sister in you."

With the music box, I sent the following additional personal Gift Note:

"My Dearest Sister Patti, From twice surmounting Cancer and now Alzheimer's, always with strength & optimism, you have my deepest love & respect. "Life Is Good" because you are in it. Know you can always "Lean On Me." - Love always, Peter-Bunny."

And in recognition that Patti would joyfully begin and end each of our conversations with her mantra: "Life Is Good", I sought and found a "Life Is Good" t-shirt, with a large happy daisy, and had it delivered to Patti with this note:

"Dearest Patti, You are the Beautiful Flower which brightens so many lives, and the Delightful Daisy in our Blackledge Garden. Life Is Good for all of us who love you, because you are in it, bringing Sunshine to all. Love, Peter-Petal".

Sadly but all too expected, Alzheimer's Disease finally savagely took Patti's mind and body, but it could not steal the legacy of love which Patti has left with each of us.

Farewell my Good And Faithful Patti-Bunny.
As our very wise friend Winnie The Pooh correctly told us:

"It makes such a difference to have someone who believes in you."

Thank you Patti, for always believing in me. You inspired not only me but all whose lives you touched, with your light so brilliantly shining forth and with your always channeling the ever-optimistic persona of Winnie The Pooh's friend Eeyore, whom you voiced to my grateful 5-year-old Peter-Bunny self, eight decades ago:

"It never hurts to keep looking for sunshine." - Eeyore

Although your departure brings deep sadness to we who remain toiling in this earthly Blackledge Bunny Burrow, yet are we able to have our every tear wiped away by faithfully gazing skyward to envision the joyous welcoming which you are now receiving in your happy new Celestial Warren, and knowing that one day we will be blessed to join you there. Until then, I shall take comfort in these wise words of our mutual friend:

"If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart. I'll stay there forever." Winnie The Pooh

There are you now, my beloved Patti-Bunny; and there shall you be always with me, until we meet again.

With enduring love from your forever grateful Peter-Bunny, your always adoring "Bun"

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The Enthralling Legend of "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May"

There is a legend oft told by wide-eyed mariners, shared over flagons of warm rum in the darkened taverns of sea towns. It is of a vision - seen by few yet never forgotten; of an exquisite diaphanous life-form said to tread the pristine beaches of Cape May and known only as "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May." Those fortunate few who have beheld this sensual being relate that she possesses a beauty far surpassing any other. Some say she is a mermaid come to land; some that she is the daughter of Poseidon; others that she must herself be a goddess, for such divine beauty could certainly never be possessed by any mortal being. And yet, within this prized sighting, there resides a dreadful terror; for those who have beheld her have become so mesmerized by her beauty as to willingly abandon all earthly possessions, yes even their very lives, for the chance to share just one moment with her. Countless mariners, though hardened by years of sea vicissitudes, have lost their ships upon the shoals of Cape May in an attempt to follow her. Inspired by their tales of wonder and yet counseled by their admonitions, I set out to feast my eyes upon this Maiden of Cape May. Lashing myself to the mast of my vessel, so as to not imperil my crew in this dangerous adventure, I sailed close upon the beaches until... there was I blessed to behold her. I tell you this, my friends: Truly there was never a greater beauty. Overcome by awe and passion, I broke my leather bonds and-despite the plaintive warnings shouted by my shipmates-swam ashore. Laughing as my impetuous action, she raced ahead, leaving only gossamer footprints to guide my pursuit. Though I could only worship her from afar, I felt truly blessed to have descried such wonderous beauty. And so, I share the image of this extraordinary maiden, so you too might know that such beauty truly does exist in our earthly plane. Yes, many of you may say this was only a dream. To those I reply: If this be my dream, I pray I shall never wake.

Rapturously Authored by Laura’s Dream Lover, Peter

Peter's One-On-One Interview
With
Admiral Arleigh Burke
-Two Hours with a Navy Legend -

In retrospect, I'm embarrassed at how totally clueless I had been - both growing up in Texas and while at the United States Naval Academy - about the importance of my Father's distinguished Navy career and about the Navy in general. Going through my Father's files after his death, I was stunned to see my Father's picture with such Navy luminaries as Admiral Jonas Ingram - for whom the destroyer USS JONAS INGRAM was named (that photo bears Admiral Ingram's hand-written note to my Dad: "To my friend") - and Fleet Admiral William Leahy, the first U.S. Naval Officer ever to hold a five-star rank in the U.S. Armed Forces, and for whom the destroyer USS LEAHY was named. And my Dad's Legion of Merit was signed by James Forrestal, the first United States Secretary of Defense and for whom the Forrestal Building was named. These are names from the history books, and my studies at the United States Naval Academy.

But a more glaring example of my ignorance occurred while I was a Midshipman at the United States Naval Academy. I had mentioned to my Dad in a phone call that I was writing my term paper on "The Bay of Pigs Invasion". My Dad's casual response to me was "Well then, you should go talk to my friend Arleigh Burke. I'll call Arleigh and arrange an appointment for you." I had absolutely no idea who Arleigh Burke was. In fact, I was sadly still totally clueless when I walked into his Washington DC office for my interview. Dad's friend Arleigh Burke had a large smile on his face, as he thrust out his huge hand and bellowed "It's a great pleasure to meet Blackie's son!!!!" I didn't understand until much later the exalted Navy presence which I had been exceedingly fortunate to share. This was not just "Dad's friend Arleigh"; this was legendary World War II combat hero Arleigh Burke; iconic "31 Knots" Arleigh Burke; longest serving Chief of Naval Operations in history Arleigh Burke; and the man for whom an entire class of the Navy's most sophisticated Destroyers were subsequently named. I also didn't understand why Admiral Burke's countenance so obviously fell when I told him the reason for my visit. Apparently, my Father had not mentioned to Admiral Burke that the reason for my visit was to gain information from him about "The Bay of Pigs" invasion of Cuba by the United States - which virtually all historians feel was a major failure for the United States. Although Admiral Burke had expressed serious advance concerns to the Kennedy administration, the Navy under Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh Burke was tasked with providing support to the invasion - and the resultant unmitigated disaster had unfortunately tainted Admiral Burke's otherwise unblemished career and had continued to haunt Admiral Burke. But being a true gentleman, and wanting to support my Dad as his fellow United States Naval Academy alumnus and friend, Admiral Burke spent over two hours with me - giving me amazing personal insights into this watershed historical event. I footnoted my interview with Admiral Burke on my "The Bay of Pigs" term paper, and my United States Naval Academy instructor dramatically circled that footnote and wrote in large red letters across my paper "Outstanding!! A+ ".

My One-on-One Meeting With Notorious Congressman Charlie Wilson

By Peter Blackledge

While I was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's Director for Naval Warfare, I was given the extraordinary honor and authority of briefing legendary Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson one-on-one in Congressman Wilson's Congressional office. It was standard Pentagon procedure to ensure that Public Affairs "handlers" accompany briefers to The Hill, particularly for Congressmen and Senators due to their ability to quickly cut funding to the Navy. But the Assistant Secretary of the Navy and broader Pentagon hierarchy were so confident in my ability that they allowed me to travel to The Hill "alone and unafraid" to brief Congressman Wilson. As is detailed in Congressman Wilson's Wikipedia biography "Wilson is best known for leading Congress into expanding weapons support to the Afghan Freedom Fighters in combating the invading Soviet army. Congressman Wilson's extraordinary leadership in arming Afghan Freedom Fighters was subsequently the subject of a best-selling book and then a Mike Nichols directed movie starring Tom Hanks as Charlie Wilson", with Julia Roberts as Charlie Wilson's love interest and the other cast members including Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Ned Beatty, and Emily Blunt. Congressman Wilson had asked the Pentagon to advise him about potential additional weapons which the Navy might supply for this purpose , and he was particularly interested in application of Depleted Uranium Penetrators (DUPs) for which I had become a key negotiator between U.S. Navy, U.S. Army, and the contractor company which produced the DUPs. I had previously become a skilled briefer during his decades as a United States Naval Academy Midshipman (Midshipmen are trained to give spontaneous talks on any subject), as a U.S. Fleet Naval Officer, as Senior Combat Systems Development Manager for

Naval Sea Systems Command, and as Director for Naval Warfare for the Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the Pentagon. I started my preparation by a "Briefing Presentation 101" basic precept: Know your audience, and find commonality and "hooks" between you and your briefing

audience. It was clear to me that Congressman Wilson loved three things: Texas, his Alma Mater the United States Naval Academy (Congressman Wilson graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1956), and women - not necessarily in that order. I had been aware of Charlie Wilson's reputation at the United States Naval Academy due to his reportedly having amassed the second largest number of disciplinary demerits in United States Naval Academy history, with his roommate amassing the largest number. Charlie Wilson's notoriety at United States Naval Academy was exceeded only by United States Naval Academy alumnus Senator John McCain and the notorious Philo McGiffin. When I arrived in Congressman Wilson's office, it was evident from Congressman Wilson's body language that he was irritated that his briefer was not the usual one or more senior Flag Officers surrounded by multiple minions. So I began his briefing by saying what an honor it was to brief a fellow United States Naval Academy alumnus - at which Congressman Wilson's stiffness slightly softened - and a fellow Texan - more slight softening evident in Congressman Wilson's demeanor - and then shared with Congressman that my sister Penny had been Rice University's 1958 Homecoming Queen and 1958 Cotton Bowl Queen and her Rice University twin sister had been the United States Naval Academy's 1958 Cotton Bowl Queen, which was the only time in history that the Naval Academy had a football bowl queen and the only time in history that twin sisters were football bowl queens for opposing colleges.

By the conclusion of my sharing that unique information, Congressman Wilson was now leaning forward and fully receptive to my presentation. As I was leaving Congressman Wilson's office, Congressman Wilson walked me to the door and slapped me on the back (as fellow good ol' Texas boys are wont to do) and said "Peter, you give my best to those two beautiful Cotton Bowl Queen Texas sisters of yours!"

Growing Up Avis

My Personal Tribute

To My Big Brother Mike

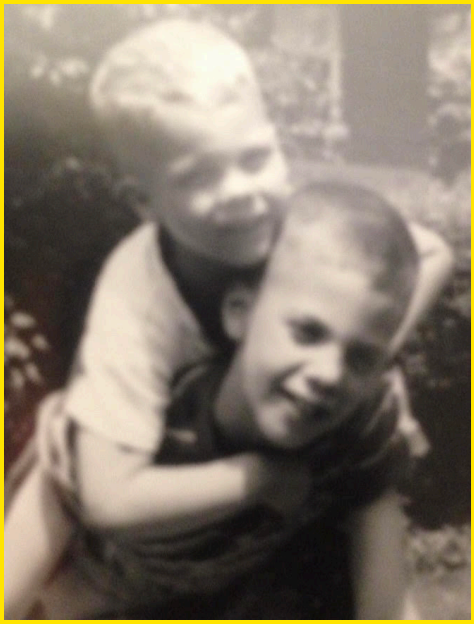
By Peter Blackledge

When I was growing up in Houston, Texas, Avis Rent-A-Car had a well-known slogan: "We're Number Two, so we try harder" - referring to their having to work harder because they were always being second to Hertz. And so it was with me regarding my older brother Mike. Mike was perfect in every area: A perfect straight-A student, a natural athlete who was always chosen first for our neighborhood football games. Mike was popular, handsome, and gregarious, loved and esteemed by all. I, sadly, was none of these.

When the neighbor teams were chosen to play football on the neighborhood vacant lot, Mike was always a Captain or chosen first; I was the skinny kid who always heard the inevitable words of the final chooser: "Well, I guess we're stuck with Pete." Each play down, I heard a similar pass play plan from every team Captain: "Frank, you go out to the right. Howard, you do a button hook to the left. Frankie, you block, and then turn around for a short pass. Pete.....Pete, you just go long". And so matter how hard I executed my appointed play-task, and no matter how loudly I then yelled "I'm open! I'm open!", the ball was never thrown in my direction. I became the derided, neighborhood football joke: I became "Go Long, Pete."

The football games would usually end when Mrs. Chalmers, our neighbor across the street, would appear on her doorstep and yell loudly to her sons about their favorite television show: "Howard, Roddy: Spin And Marty is on!", which signaled it was time for our football game to end. And

with the sun dimming, Mike and I would walk back toward our house. Mike would easily yell out to our neighbor as we passed near their house: "Hi Mrs. Chalmers." I, unfortunately, was too shy to even look up, and too nervous about my ever-present stutter to say anything.



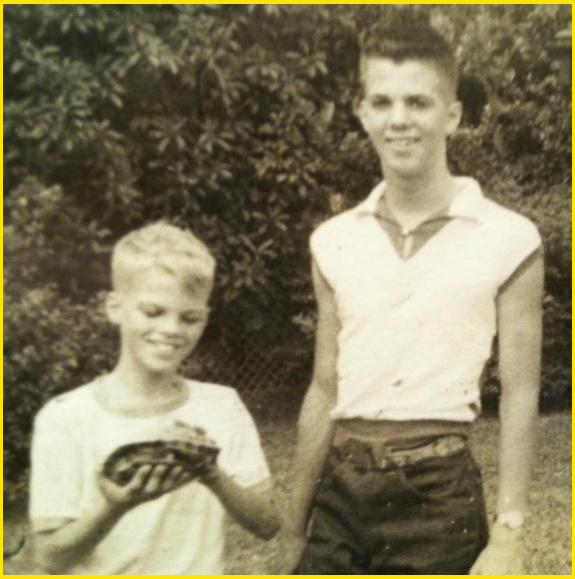
At Rio Vista Summer Camp, Mike received every honor. He was immediately and consistently chosen for the prized "Flaming Arrow" award by the Camp Counselors due to his exemplary conduct and performance, and was even chosen by all his fellow campers for the ultimate award of "White Arrow" for being the most popular and admired camper of all. I wanted so badly and deeply to achieve such awards, and I tried and tried and tried, but despite Mike's easily winning those awards each and every year, I could never attain even one of them, even one year, no matter how hard I tried.

In school, I was always in the shadow of Mike. Mike was a perennial straight-A student through Roberts Elementary School, Pershing Junior High School, and Lamar High School. At Lamar, he additionally was President of the National Honor Society, and a National Merit Scholarship Semi-Finalist. I was none of these, struggling to simply maintain B's and C's.

Throughout my growing up, I could understand our father constantly referring to Mike as his "Number One Son", albeit those words took on a darker feeling in light of my glaring inadequacies in contrast to Mike's "Golden Boy" status. Everything just seemed to come so easily to Mike; so effortlessly. For me, everything was a struggle. What stung most were our Mother's words to me: "Why can't you be more like your brother?" I overheard our mother talking on the phone and saying, "Peter is such a disappointment."

But none of this was Mike's fault; he was always a good brother, putting up with his hapless younger brother. I idolized and revered Mike. When, as a member of the sixth grader Audio Visual Team, Mike and his "big boy" classmates would periodically enter my Kindergarten classroom at our mutual Roberts Elementary School, to set up for educational films, I would proudly point to him and excitedly whisper to my classmates "That's my big brother!" And I wanted to be like him, attempting to emulate Mike in his every endeavor. When Mike started a Stamp Collection, I started a Stamp Collection. And when Mike wisely informed me there was a secret weapon more

deadly than the Atomic Bomb or the Nuclear Bomb, called the "Cobalt Bomb", I - with a 5-year-old's swagger - sagaciously announced that precious, inside information to my fellow wide-eyed kindergarteners. And when Mike one day came into our bedroom displaying a fistful of dollar bills, explaining to me that he had sold the excess wire hangers from our home to the neighborhood dry cleaners, I immediately ran through our house - pulling clothes off their wire hangers, and tossing those clothes unceremoniously onto the floor, in order to gain their precious wire hangers. Unfortunately, as with most of my emulations of Mike, that attempt to "Be Like Mike" was not successful. The owner of the dry cleaners - when I arrived there, beaming with hope over the envisioned compensation for my purloined wire hangars - crouched down, sad-faced, and put a sympathetic hand on my shoulder as he imparted the bad news: His dry cleaners already had more wire hangars than needed, but he had paid Mike for his wire hangars due to being impressed with Mike's creativity and industry. I, crestfallen, slinked back home - only to be confronted by my irate Mother, angrily asking me why all the clothes were lying on the ground.



But there were five occasions, which I today still cherish, in which my Perfect Older Brother actually complimented me, despite my being his woefully inadequate Hapless Little Brother. These gave me hope and direction.

The first occurred circa 1958 in the confines of our small, shared bedroom at 2307 Gramercy Street. Mike and I had many innocent brotherly tussles in that 1950s Texas style "Ultimate Warrior Death-Match Steel Cage". In this incident, Mike has cornered me on my lower bunk bed, where I hid cowering beneath my tattered cotton bedspread. Mike then began asserting his dominance by playfully stabbing me through my covering blanket with our Mother's omnipresent wooden yardstick - not with malice or harm, but with shouted utterances expressing his authority with each thrust, as he waited for my always-previously-occurring whiny plea "I Give". I, being grateful for even this questionable display of Mike's attention and Brotherly Love - was actually giggling beneath the bedspread. I had always obsequiously accepted Mike's dominance, and this event was no exception. I knew I had to endure Mike's jabs until he grew tired or I submitted with my usual "I Give". But then, suddenly, new and totally different words surprisingly sprang to my 11-year-old lips - perhaps delivered there by The Patron Saint Of Persecuted Little Brothers - as I

uncharacteristically yelled out: “Who do you think I am - Polonius?” Mike suddenly and completely stopped his attack, stunned initially into silence, and then uncharacteristically into stammering “My God, this guy even has literary references”, and in his shock immediately left the room. Wow!!! I had found an “Intellectual” chink in Mike’s previously impervious Big Brother armor. I now had a new and important “Be Like Mike” goal: Become a learned and well-read person; become an intellectual; become a “Renaissance Man.” I was ebullient in my discovery, and resolute in my new determination.

The second compliment from Mike came circa 1963. Throughout his life, Mike had extraordinary discipline. Every day when he came home from school, before going outside to play football or basketball with our neighborhood friends, Mike would sit down and do all his homework. And each night, before going to bed, Mike would do his evening regimen of pushups. I, sadly, never had any semblance of such discipline. But, in hopes of becoming stronger and more athletic like my big brother - and disdainful of my scrawny physique while impressed by the amazing effect of weightlifting on my neighborhood friend Leo Thomas - for Christmas circa 1959 I asked my father for a set of weights. Dad no doubt fully expected me to abandon that pursuit like I had every other. But now, I was determined. Every afternoon, I would be out in our cold spartan concrete-floored garage, pressing and bench-pressing and curling until my shocked muscles screamed for relief - and then I would do even more, pushing myself beyond pain and exhaustion. And when I had outgrown that simple weight set, I took my determination to the local YMCA and began attacking the Olympic weights and other equipment available there. In the Summer of 1963, Mike had, once again, perfectly fulfilled our Father’s dream, by graduating from our Father’s beloved Alma Mater: the United States Naval Academy (USNA). In fact, Mike had been even more perfect, graduating first in mathematics in his Naval Academy class. Returning home after his USNA graduation, Mike came to that YMCA to play basketball with his best high school friend, Travis Braeshier. During his YMCA visit, Mike came down to the YMCA weightlifting room, where he encountered a transformed little brother. The four years of my heavy weightlifting, while Mike was at USNA, had packed impressive muscle into my previous Wally Cox - Barney Fife frame. As Mike came into my YMCA weightlifting domicile, I was anxious to demonstrate my new power. Pressing an Olympic 135-pound barbell over my head, I watched with one hopeful eye for Mike’s reaction. He didn’t say anything, but he nodded approval. MY BIG BROTHER HAD NODDED APPROVAL TO ME. It felt like “The Nod Heard Round The World.” A new “Little Brother” determination emerged: I was going to be strong, I was going to be the best, I was going to be unbeatable.

The third compliment from Mike came in 1965. Mike was home on military leave and happened to walk out onto our Gramercy driveway where I - now a Senior at Houston's Mirabeau B. Lamar High School - was preparing for a date with a new girl at Lamar. "Cheryl" had transferred from East Texas, and she had tearfully told me - during our first conversation, at our lockers after Civics class - how difficult it was being the "new girl in school", and how deeply she missed her home in small-town Tyler, Texas. She wistfully recounted the beautiful, clear East Texas night sky, perfectly illuminated by its glowing crescent moon and a thousand twinkling stars - and her eyes sparkled as she described the smell of Tyler Roses, the omnipresent pinecones, Tyler's beautiful and unique Red Earth, and even the comforting staccato of Tyler's pumping oil wells and the sound of water softly lapping against the shore of Tyler Lake. Cheryl had touched my heart, and I wanted to somehow console and rescue her by at least temporarily transporting her back to the solace of her Tyler home. And so, I had spent considerable time fashioning a Crescent Moon out of silver cardboard, then fastening it and a galaxy of Silver Stars to the interior roof of my prized '57 Chevy. On my Chevy's floor, I had sprinkled dirt which I had dyed red, along with pinecones, and had strategically placed a facsimile oil well derrick on my Chevy's back seat. And on a portable tape recorder, I had captured the sounds of pumping oil wells and lapping waters. Mike was amazed and impressed, expressing a passing compliment. As with the "Polonius" incident many years earlier, I had serendipitously found another chink in Mike's formidable armor: Creativity and Support To Others. I was elated, and added "Bold Creativity" to my Little Brother list of determinations. Additionally, I received a second - and more enduring - compliment from Cheryl. Not only that night, but continuing during her subsequent career as an award-winning, best-selling author and poet. Cheryl later told me that she had won first place in a radio station call-in contest for "The Best Date Ever" by relating her account of that evening, and had additionally written several published poems about that evening and had a newspaper article about it published in "The Houston Post". She had entitled her writings "The Perfect Date", as the true story of her ("Silver Stars") and my ("Military Bars") special evening. Here is part of what Cheryl wrote:

"**The Perfect Date**": The Story Of Silver Stars And Military Bars, by Cheryl Davis

"I was just sixteen, and it was Saturday. I had a date with Pete that night and I was very excited. Pete was very popular, and the very first time I saw him he took my breath away when he smiled at me. This date turned out to be extraordinary from the start. When I opened the door, there was Pete - so tall and handsome - holding a dozen yellow roses. These were Tyler roses, "The Yellow Rose Of Texas", and my favorite. We said our good-byes to my Mom and Dad and we headed to his car - a beautiful black 1957 Chevy. As we neared the parking lot, Pete told me to close my eyes. He walked me around to the passenger side of the car, opened the door for me, and helped me into my seat. When he finally told me to open my eyes, I was awestruck by what I saw. Darn it, I'd just gotten the tears to stop from the roses, but when I saw the inside of his car I started to cry all over again. It took my breath away. There were over a hundred little silver stars

stuck to the roof and a crescent shaped moon hung from the overhead light. There was Red Dirt on the floor, and pinecones and scattered needles. There was a miniature oil well derrick in the back and glitter all around to represent the silver star dust. He even had a tape recording of water washing up against the shore. He'd thought of everything. He was everything."

The fourth compliment to me from Mike came to me two years later, in the Summer of 1967. I had been accepted into the United States Naval Academy, and was pleasantly surprised to be able to attend the same institution as my eminently-more-qualified older brother and our revered Father - and even being awarded my nomination by the same Texas icon who had congratulated Mike on stage at his graduation - U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. My father had suggested that I try out for the Crew Team at USNA. I had serious doubts that a mediocre-at-best athlete such as I could hope to make the Crew Team at USNA - which just the previous year had fully swept the first place National Champion medals in every event at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) National Championships. But I was determined to go hard for it. What I happily discovered that was all my "Avis" years of trying harder had imbued me with a singular discipline and determination which - coupled with the focused regimen of weightlifting which I had undertaken years earlier in hopes of being more like my natural-athlete older brother - had amazingly hardened me into a formidable athlete. I not only made First Boat on the Freshman and Varsity USNA Crew Team, I was able to win the coveted "Six Seat", which is the "Power Seat" where competitive crews place their strongest Oarsman. And, in the Summer of 1967, this transformed Texas kid - who had never even seen a Racing Shell before entering USNA in the Summer of 1965 - amazingly won the 1967 2V8 Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Championships. But an even greater elation came to me when I showed my National Champion medal to Mike. He looked at it for what seemed to me to be an eternity, seemingly deep in thought as he kept rolling it between his thumb and forefingers. Finally, he handed my National Champion medal back to me, uttering only two words: "Good Job", before he turned and walked away. Just two words, which would not mean much to most people. But to this seriously flawed little brother, who had given his heart to two decades of "Avis" striving to be recognized by his perfect big brother, they meant the world.

Mike's fifth and final compliment came in 2002. Building on the fruit of my four previous challenges and resultant compliments from Mike, I had enjoyed an extraordinarily successful professional career: Being promoted early at each rank as a Naval Officer, and then advancing rapidly through the Department of the Navy (DON) hierarchy, from Entry Engineer to Manager and ultimately to become the first Director for Naval Warfare and then first Director for Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships for the Assistant Secretary of the Navy - receiving 52 performance awards and twice being awarded the DON Superior Civilian Service Award and Medal, Navy's second highest honor. Approaching age 55 and with 37 years of Government Service, I was soon to be eligible for retirement. I was pleasantly surprised that numerous major companies had apparently been following my career, as they now appeared on my doorstep with extravagant offers for employment. After my extensive review, I narrowed the field of offers to my two preferences: the Russell 1000 company "Booz Allen Hamilton" (BAH) and the S&P 500 company "Science Applications International Corporation" (SAIC). A Vice Admiral who was a USNA'63 classmate of Mike's - and a friend of mine - was leading Booz Allen Hamilton's pursuit of me,

flattering me with his statement that I was the only person in BAH history for whom every top BAH manager attended his BAH sponsored "Hope You Will Join Us" luncheon. One of the very top officials at SAIC was leading their pursuit of me, with multiple luncheons, almost daily phone calls, and their offer of bringing me in as a Vice President with a wonderful Signing Bonus and generous Stock Options. I was torn by which offer to accept, until Mike's wise counsel broke the impasse, providing the assessment which showed that SAIC was my better choice. After I followed Mike's advice, Mike then gave me his fifth and final compliment: "Pete, you are the most professionally successful of ALL of us five Blackledge siblings." WOW, WOW, WOW. How did that happen? How did I, "The Least Of These", become worthy of such praise by my revered older brother?

When, in 2019, "The Times Of Montebello" published a full-page Personal Profile of me entitled "Peter Blackledge: Renaissance Man" - thereby fulfilling my very first, 1955 "Be Like Mike" resolution, the answer to that Sphinxian Riddle became clear to me: Virtually every one of my Life Accomplishments can be traced to my striving to emulate and gain the respect of my idolized older brother. It is often said that challenge and struggle make us stronger, bringing out our best self. And now in the Autumn of my life, I can embrace not only my idolized brother but also the challenges which so burdened me as a child and younger adult. I recalled the Bible verse "The first shall be last, and the last first." I give thanks to God for blessing me not only with this extraordinary brother, but also with the gift of "Growing Up Avis."

Fascinating
Frames & Moments:
Peter's Hilarious, Touching,
& Amazing Videos

Peter's Hilarious & Amazing Music Video To Celebrate Laura's Sister Alison Turning 60 "I Heard It Through The Grapevine, Not Much Longer You'll Be 59"

From their first meeting - when Peter took my sister Alison out for a laughter-filled drive in his Porsche 9-11 Convertible and then mailed Alison a copy of the Marc Anthony salsa music which she had admired during their drive - Peter and my sister Alison have enjoyed a very special, fun and playful relationship.

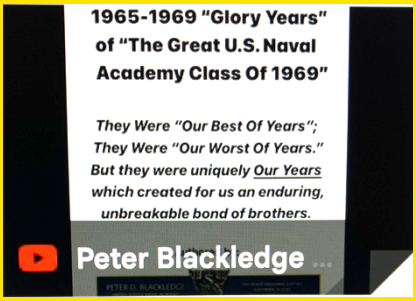
So when Alison approached her "Big 6-0" birthday in 2013, Peter wanted to give Alison very special, playful, and fun recognition. Accordingly, he wrote, choreographed, and produced a special birthday music video - "I Heard It Through The Grapevine, Not Much Longer You'll Be 59" - and surreptitiously arranged for Alison's family and friends to perform in it. It was priceless having Alison's son Patrick (the tall guy in dark glasses on the left side of the standing back row) react to the music video tag line "We Heard It From Patrick That You're Going Geriatric." Peter even slipped in a line for Alison's husband, who is a fervent Chicago Cubs fan. Here is the link to this hysterical birthday music video:

https://youtu.be/mansShql9rE?si=frbvWzKowdoMbnco

The Glory Years Of
U.S. Naval Academy Class Of 1969

For the 55th Anniversary Celebration of the Graduation of U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1969, Peter canvassed the class for their best pictures of USNA'69 1965-1969 "Glory Years", and incorporated them into this very powerful video - further enhanced by Peter backing up the visual impact of the photos with the audio impact of Naval Academy Choir singing "Navy Blue and Gold." It is truly a visceral masterpiece of USNA'69 memories.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ED1ldZKe20A&authuser=0


1965-1969 "Glory Years"
of "The Great U.S. Naval
Academy Class Of 1969"
They Were "Our Best Of Years";
They Were "Our Worst Of Years."
But they were uniquely Our Years
which created for us an enduring,
unbreakable bond of brothers.
Peter Blackledge

Sweet, Amazing Abigail

Abigail is truly extraordinary. She dances, plays the piano and other instruments, plays soccer, and gives Bible readings from the pulpit of her church. At four years old, Abigail was the youngest student in the dance classes which Peter taught at Montebello; Peter's oldest dance student was age 93. We cherish the above pictures which Abigail's grandmother took of Peter teaching then-four-year old Abigail how to do the "Brooklyn Shuffle" Line Dance, which John Travolta performed in his iconic movie "Saturday Night Fever".

We also love this picture, which Abigail's grandmother took of Abigail and Peter celebrating Fourth of July in 2021.

When Peter in 2023 became sick with terminal Stage Four Advanced Metastatic Prostate Cancer, Lymph Node Cancer, and Bone Cancer, Abigail's grandmother sent Peter the following note and pictures:

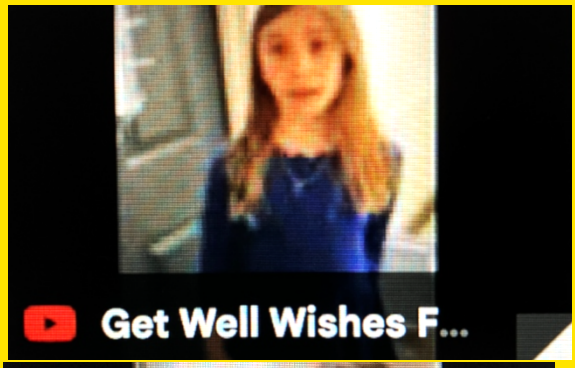
"Hi Peter,

Abigail is concerned about you. Today at church she lit the candle and prayed for you.

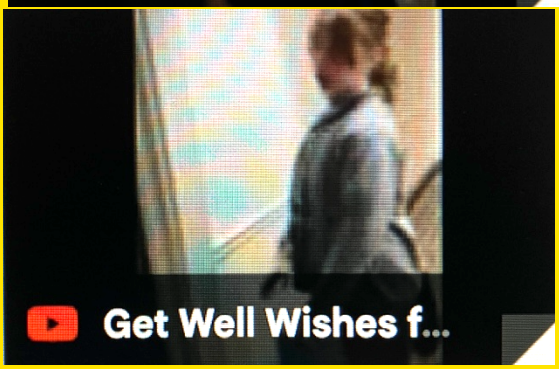
Abigail's grandma "

The following two short successive videos were taken by Abigail's grandmother in 2023 and 2025, when Abigail's grandmother brought Abigail to Peter's door so that Abigail could leave sweet get-well cards and videos to support and encourage Peter:

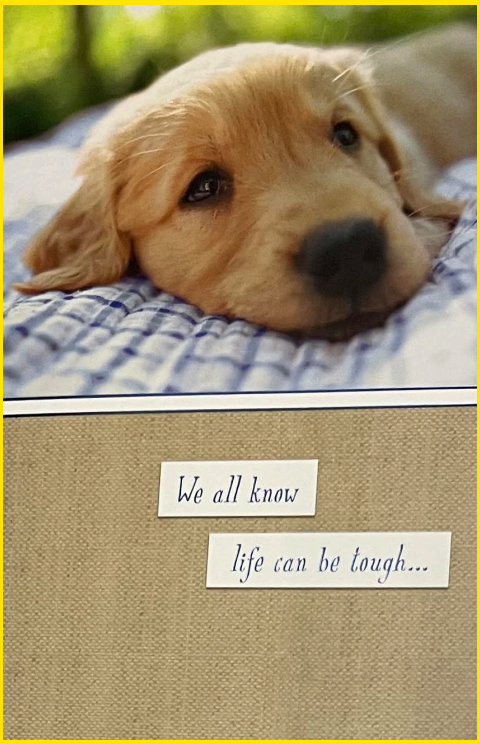
https://youtu.be/Tv-xK8TyEcY



https://youtu.be/bZrbSCe7qQQ



2025 Card:



Lamar High School
Class Of 1965
Champagne & Pizza Party

By Peter Blackledge

After my flying from Washington DC to Houston, Texas, for Lamar Class of 1965 50th Anniversary celebration, I had a spontaneous thought to invite my classmates to my hotel suite that night for a Friday night impromptu "Lamar'65 Champagne & Pizza Party" before our scheduled Saturday night party. I expected that only a few of my classmates would be able to attend on such short notice, and I was pleasantly surprised when more than 50 of my classmates squeezed into my suite. It was so much crazy fun!!!!

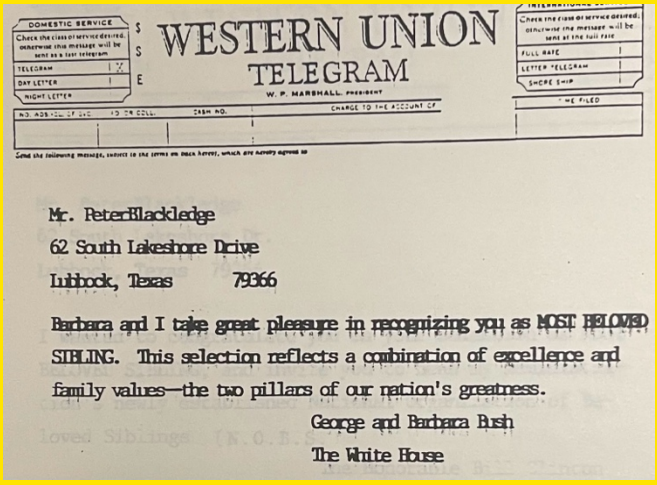
During the gathering, someone took this short video panorama of the room, just as everyone started spontaneously singing the Beatles “We all live in a yellow submarine” refrain:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPFh4UBFTY4

Peter's Hilarious Acceptance Speech
To The Outrageous
"Most Beloved Sibling" Contest

During Blackledge family planning for the Christmas 1992 reunion at sister Patti's home in Lubbock, Texas, one of Peter's siblings repeatedly suggested in letters that the family should vote at the reunion for who of the five Blackledge siblings was "The Most Beloved Sibling." Peter and his sister strongly objected to this as a terrible idea, feeling that having such a competitive contest among the naturally competitive Blackledge siblings would unnecessarily introduce strife and angst during what should be a season of love and harmony. But unfortunately the suggestion took hold. So Peter decided to take this lemon and turn it around into fun and joyful lemonade, as follows:

1. Peter placed a full-page ad in the Lubbock newspaper: "The City of Lubbock warmly welcomes the arrival of Peter Blackledge, the esteemed "Most Beloved Sibling.""
2. Peter sent a large arrangement of roses and balloons to Patti's home, with the note "The City of Lubbock" is deeply honored to have "Most Beloved Sibling, Peter Blackledge, grace our fair city with his presence."
3. Peter sent a note from The Mayor of Lubbock, on his letterhead, presenting the Key to The City of Lubbock to "Most Beloved Sibling" Peter Blackledge.
4. Peter wrote two songs extolling Peter Blackledge as "The Most Beloved Sibling", and arranged for a professional singer to come to Patti's home to sing them to the Blackledge family.
5. Peter arranged for the attached congratulatory Western Union Telegrams to be sent to Patti's home - congratulating Peter on his being elected as "Most Beloved Sibling" - from U.S. President George H. W. Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush; U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle (complete with misspellings



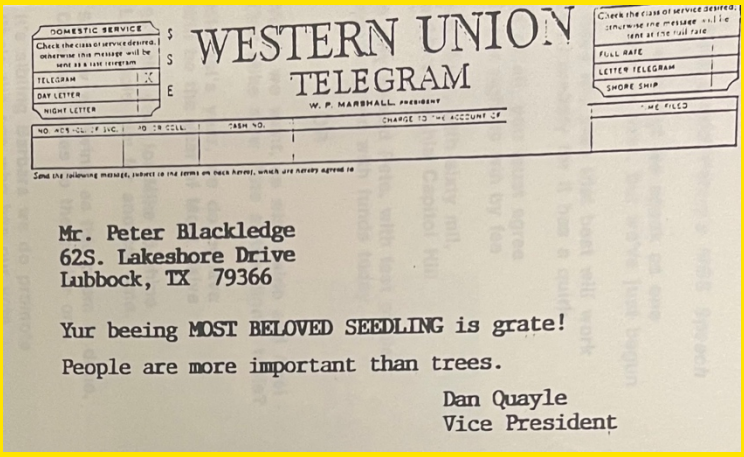
WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM
W. P. MARSHALL, PRESIDENT

Mr. PeterBlackledge
62 South Lakeshore Drive
Lubbock, Texas 79366

Barbara and I take great pleasure in recognizing you as MOST BELOVED SIBLING. This selection reflects a combination of excellence and family values—the two pillars of our nation's greatness.

George and Barbara Bush
The White House

and misunderstandings); Governor and Presidential Nominee Bill Clinton; and Pope John Paul. Peter also managed to obtain letterhead from Kennedy Institute, on which he wrote a congratulatory posthumous letter from former President John F. Kennedy.



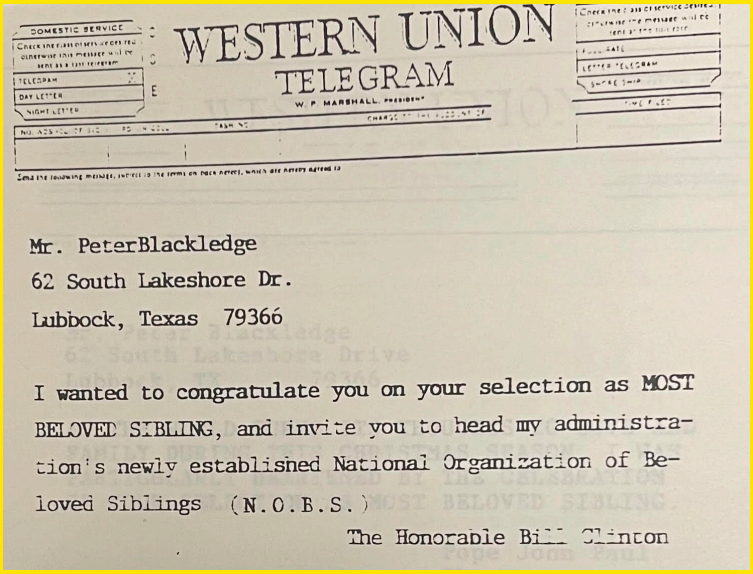
WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM
W. P. MARSHALL, PRESIDENT

Mr. Peter Blackledge
62S. Lakeshore Drive
Lubbock, TX 79366

Yur beeing MOST BELOVED SEEDLING is grate!

People are more important than trees.

Dan Quayle
Vice President

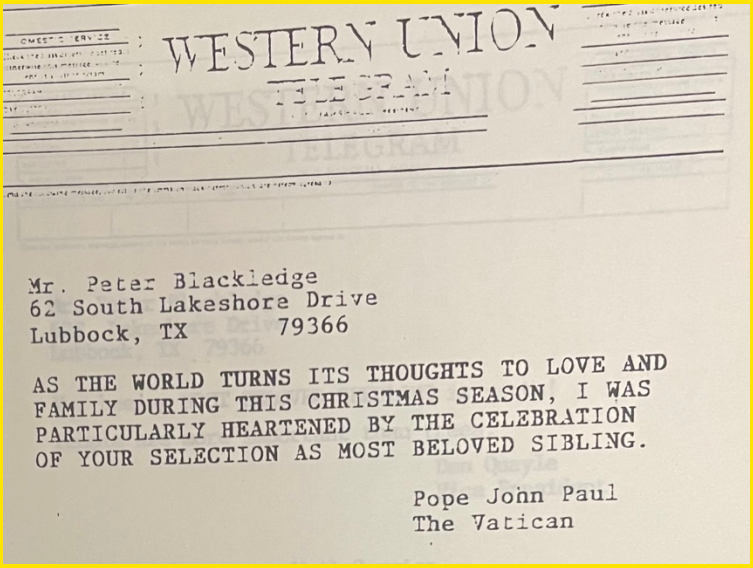


WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM
W. P. MARSHALL, PRESIDENT

Mr. PeterBlackledge
62 South Lakeshore Dr.
Lubbock, Texas 79366

I wanted to congratulate you on your selection as MOST BELOVED SIBLING, and invite you to head my administration's newly established National Organization of Beloved Siblings (N.O.B.S.)

The Honorable Bill Clinton

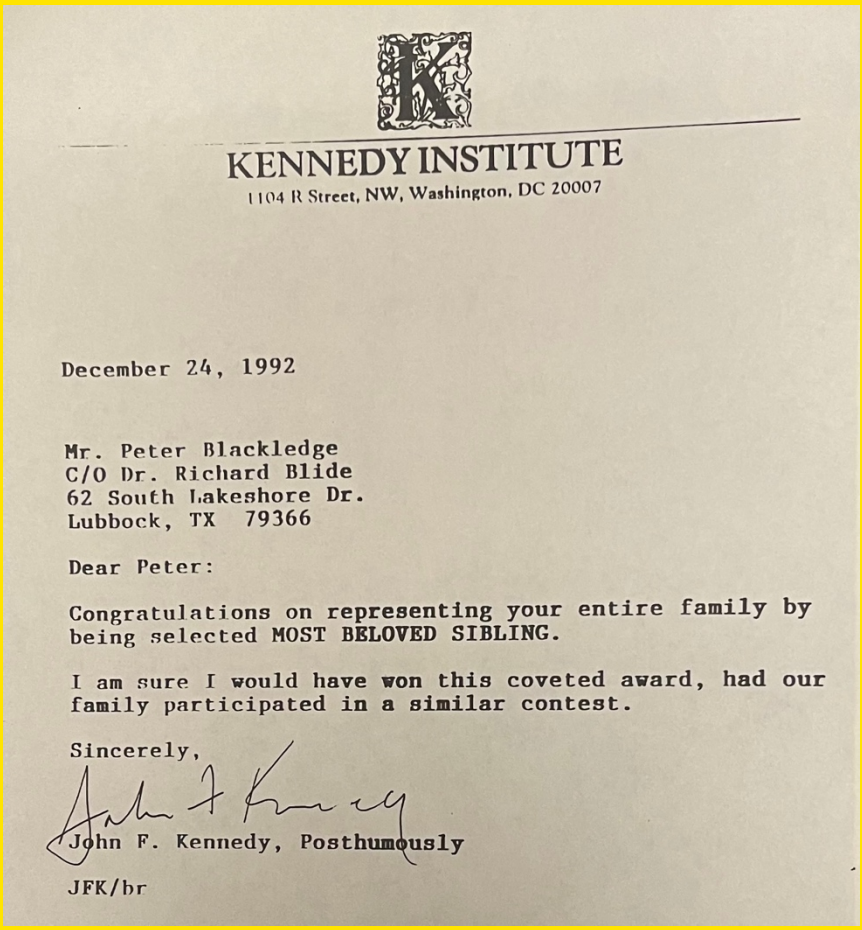


WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

Mr. Peter Blackledge
62 South Lakeshore Drive
Lubbock, TX 79366

AS THE WORLD TURNS ITS THOUGHTS TO LOVE AND FAMILY DURING THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON, I WAS PARTICULARLY HEARTENED BY THE CELEBRATION OF YOUR SELECTION AS MOST BELOVED SIBLING.

Pope John Paul
The Vatican



KENNEDY INSTITUTE
1104 R Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007

December 24, 1992

Mr. Peter Blackledge
C/O Dr. Richard Blide
62 South Lakeshore Dr.
Lubbock, TX 79366

Dear Peter:

Congratulations on representing your entire family by being selected MOST BELOVED SIBLING.

I am sure I would have won this coveted award, had our family participated in a similar contest.

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy, Posthumously

JFK/br

The attached video link is to the hilarious acceptance speech which Peter gave to the Blackledge family, in which Peter proved from Bible scripture that his selection as “Most Beloved Sibling” was ordained by God, after which Peter humbly and very humorously bestowed the honor on another Blackledge family member.

https://youtu.be/cWEJXr2cTXQ

Peter's Beautifully Romantic & Amazing Birthday Surprise For Laura: Peter Flew In Laura's Family And Hired A Chauffeured Moonroof Limousine

The most amazing birthday surprise which Peter pulled off was in 2013. It started when Peter picked me up at my door in Reston, had me close my eyes as he gently led me out to the parking lot, and then had me open my eyes to see a beautiful long, black, stretch, moon-roof limousine with uniformed chauffeur standing before me. I was stunned by this extraordinary surprise. But then Peter opened the limousine door to reveal the even-more-extraordinary birthday surprise inside my extraordinary birthday surprise. There inside the stretch limousine was my entire family, singing "Happy Birthday" to me and blowing birthday horns and tossing birthday confetti. Peter had arranged for my entire family to be flown in from all over the East Coast: my Sister and Brother-In-Law and Niece from Chicago, my Nephew from New York City, and my Brother and Sister-In-Law from Philadelphia. By this time, tears of joy were streaming down my face at seeing my beloved family, who were also joyfully tearful at this glorious reunion.

Peter had arranged for the uniformed limousine driver to drive us first to my favorite drive-through - Wendy's - so we could enjoy the startled gasps on the faces of Wendy's staff and patrons as our super-stretch limousine glided through the Wendy's drive-through window, and then drive us to my favorite place in the entire DMV area - the Washington Zoo, for me to enjoy an extended visit with the animals I love so much - and finally to an exquisite Indian restaurant for dinner. Peter captured the entire experience in video and photos so that we could all share those memories forever.

In the above screen shots from the video, we are laughing and talking and sipping champagne inside the stretch limousine, and arriving at the iconic entrance to the Washington Zoo.

Here is the full video:

https://youtu.be/FBDtSDLkSLs

Laura's Birthday Surprise #2:
Peter Secretly Gathered
Laura's Favorite Work Colleagues

In 2016, Peter managed to gather all my favorite work colleagues from District Of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) and then sneak them into his condominium to jump out and sing "Happy Birthday" to me and hug me as I opened the door.

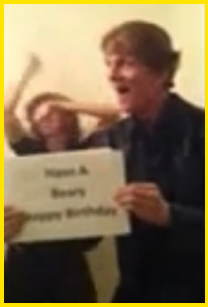
Here's the video:

https://youtu.be/MNWn81y0aEk

Peter & Laura Perform A Hilarious Air-Guitar Dance Video To Celebrate The Birthday Of Laura's Sister Alison

Peter knew that my sister Alison loves The Beatles and she also loves dancing and playing Air Guitar. So for Alison's next birthday, Peter developed choreography to the Beatles' song "Birthday", in which Peter played Air Guitar and I provided the Go-Go dancing in the background. Peter also developed signs which addressed several family inside jokes for display. The result is "The Beatle Bears" making their official music debut in this original video honoring Chicago Celebrity Alison's birthday:

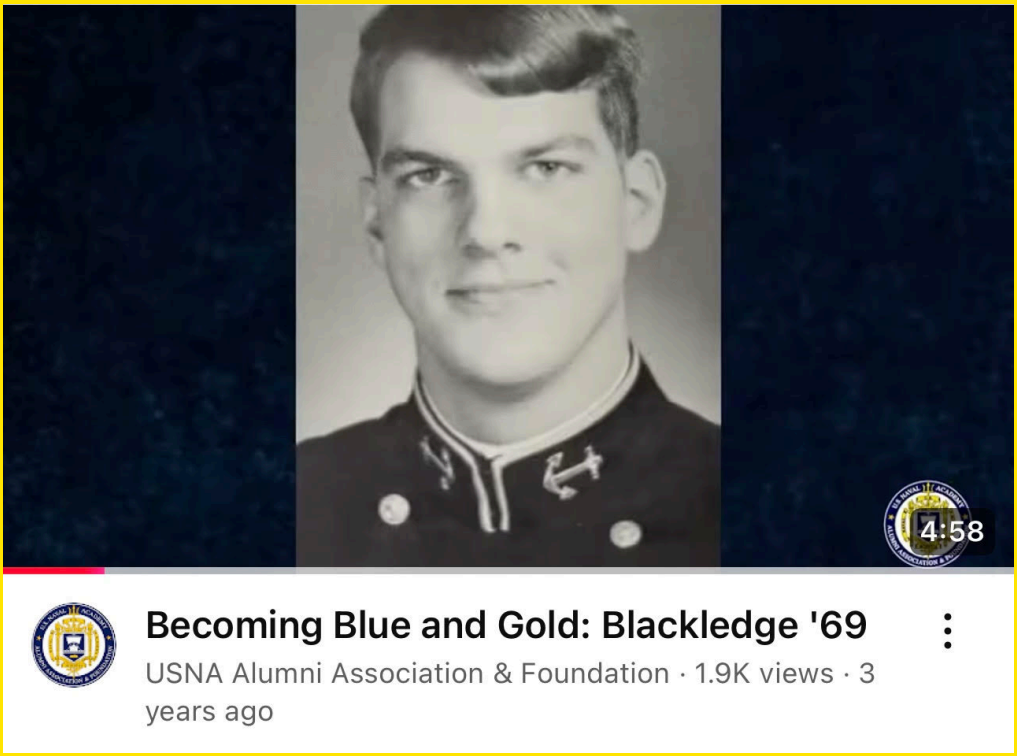
https://youtu.be/ZmJqKNlk7LE



“Becoming Blue & Gold”: United States Naval Academy Honors Peter Douglas Blackledge By Producing A Video Of His Life

In 2022, the United States Naval Academy produced a special video of Peter’s life, which they entitled “Becoming Blue And Gold”. The United States Naval Academy broadly promulgated their video production, posting it to YouTube and all of their online and proprietary venues. That United States Naval Academy video can be viewed via this link:

https://youtu.be/fO4VDFcRKF4



Peter’s Salsa Dance Demonstration

Peter had gained in impressive reputation throughout Virginia, Maryland, and District Of Columbia for being an outstanding Salsa Dancer, and had won numerous Salsa Dance contests at the iconic “Salsa Room” nightclub and other venues. In 2012, Peter was asked to perform a Salsa Dance Demonstration at one of the leading dance studios in Virginia. One of the studio’s students recorded Peter’s demonstration, and posted it to YouTube in the attached video.

https://youtu.be/mAwErTGM38I

United States Naval Academy
Dedicates The
“PETER BLACKLEDGE, ‘69”
Navy Crew Racing Shell

In 2019, the United States Naval Academy honored Peter by dedicating the “PETER BLACKLEDGE, ‘69” Navy Crew Racing Shell. The special dedication ceremony was held at the United States Naval Academy’s historic Hubbard Hall, with over 150 attendees including United States Navy and United States Marine Corps Flag Officers, United States Government Senior Executives, and United States Naval Academy Rowing Champions: The 1971 Eastern Sprints Champions, the 1971 Intercollegiate Rowing Association VFW National Champions, the 1971 Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Champions, the 1967 Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Champions, the 1965 “Clean Sweep” Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Champions, the United States Naval Academy Class of 1963 Plebe United States Olympic Trials Team, and the 1960 United States Olympic Team.

It was a grand celebration, further honored, celebrated, and documented by the United States Naval Academy’s publication of 300 copies of an extraordinary 40-page Blue & Gold Background, Full Color, Commemorative Program to serve as treasured Keepsakes for the attendees. The ceremony was initiated by a special performance of the United States Navy Band, followed by Welcome by the United States Naval Academy Director of Rowing, Opening Prayer by the Pentagon Chaplain, and the Keynote Speech by Peter (video in two parts, attached).

Peter’s Keynote Speech, Part One:

https://youtu.be/PO8y98yJrlY

Peter's Keynote Speech, Part Two:

https://youtu.be/itjL6JiYrAE

Maiden Voyage First Strokes

At the conclusion of the Dedication and Christening of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell, the shell was carried by the United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsmen to the waters adjacent to Hubbard Hall, and was rowed in exposition for the Maiden Voyage First Strokes of "PETER BLACKLEDGE '69" - to the cheers and applause of the 150 ceremony attendees, followed by all attendees joyfully and proudly singing the "Navy Blue And Gold" Alma Mater anthem of United States Naval Academy (video attached).

https://youtu.be/HzlNRC5Q9dM

Peter's 2024 MEMORIAL Dedication Ceremony Honoring Fallen & Deceased

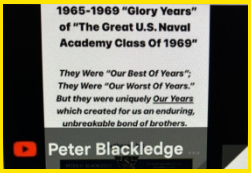
Background

Due to the sudden, tragic death of Peter's U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) roommate Gerald "Mitch" Mitchell, Peter wanted to specially honor Mitch by following a 150-year USNA tradition of donating and naming a Navy Crew Racing Shell (NCRS) in Mitch's name. However, after Peter's subsequent many tearful conversations not only with Mitch's Widow and Family, but with numerous other Widows/Families, Peter was deeply touched by the pain so many continued to bear. Resultantly, Peter decided to name his donated Navy Crew Racing Shell "MEMORIAL" to honor and support ALL the Fallen/Deceased and their Widows/Families - including Peter's USNA Class of 1969 (with particular honor the USNA'69 seventeen fallen members), USNA Varsity Heavyweight Teammates and Coaches, Lamar High School Class of 1965, Montebello Condominium neighbors, and Peter's and my Family and Close Friends. Peter knew that Mitch, who was an extraordinarily compassionate, humble, and giving man, would love making his ceremony so beautifully inclusive. Peter's oncologist kindly agreed to Peter's request to pause his treatment for Stage Four Advanced Metastatic Prostate Cancer, Bone Cancer, and Lymph Node Cancer long enough for Peter to plan and host this important event. This MEMORIAL NCRS was dedicated-christened-launched at USNA's historic Hubbard Hall on 30August2024. Over 150 persons traveled from all over the country to participate in the special ceremony, including Peter's USNA'69 Classmates, his Lamar'65 High School Classmates, his USNA Varsity Heavyweight Rowing Teammates, his USS ALBANY (CG-10) Shipmates, Peter's and my family members, and our Montebello Condominium neighbors, as well as the USNA Athletic Director and Director for Rowing, and the USNA'69 Chaplain.

A videographer (supplemented by two professional photographers) recorded the extraordinarily moving celebration in the following six videos:

USNA'69 Memorial Videos, 30Aug2024

USNA Class of 1969 Memorial Dedication, Part One: New 130-picture YouTube Video, was developed by Peter Blackledge with submissions from USNA'69 Classmates & Companies, to set the stage by honoring "The Glory Years" (1965-1969) of "The Great Class of 1969" on its 55th Anniversary.

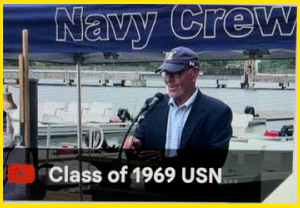

1965-1969 "Glory Years"
of "The Great U.S. Naval
Academy Class Of 1969"
They Were "Our Best Of Years";
They Were "Our Worst Of Years."
But they were uniquely Our Years
which created for us an enduring,
unbreakable bond of brothers.
Peter Blackledge

https://youtu.be/ED1ldZKe20A

2. USNA Class of 1969 Memorial Dedication, Part Two, Celebration of Life, Musical Performance By Bob “Cat” Cannan (USNA’72), Former Lead Singer & Lead Guitarist of the iconic USNA Rock Band “The Spiffys”:

https://youtu.be/17xcZuce8S0

3. USNA Class of 1969 Memorial Dedication, Part Three: Opening Remarks by USNA Associate Athletic Director, USNA Director of Athletics, and USNA Director of Rowing, providing USNA/USNA’69 Rowing History



https://youtu.be/MFfUjslAs6E

4. USNA Class of 1969 Memorial Dedication, Part Four: **Dedication** by Sponsor, Planner, and Host Peter Blackledge, USNA’69

https://youtu.be/j0vHKGiFViI

5. USNA Class of 1969 Memorial Dedication, Part Five: **Christening Part 1** by Sponsor, Planner, and Host Peter Blackledge, USNA'69.
Peter presented to each of the 17 USNA'69 Representatives honoring the 17 USNA'17 Fallen a special USNA'69-crested "They Shall Not Be Forgotten" Champagne Flute and USNA'69-crested "They Shall Not Be Forgotten" Lapel Pin which Peter had designed for the event (see pictures in attached Agenda) and Peter also provided special Gold Christening Cups with which each Widow/Family christened Memorial in the name of their deceased loved one, as Peter struck the Navy Brass Bell once after each name was called out (following the USA 9-11 Memorial tradition.

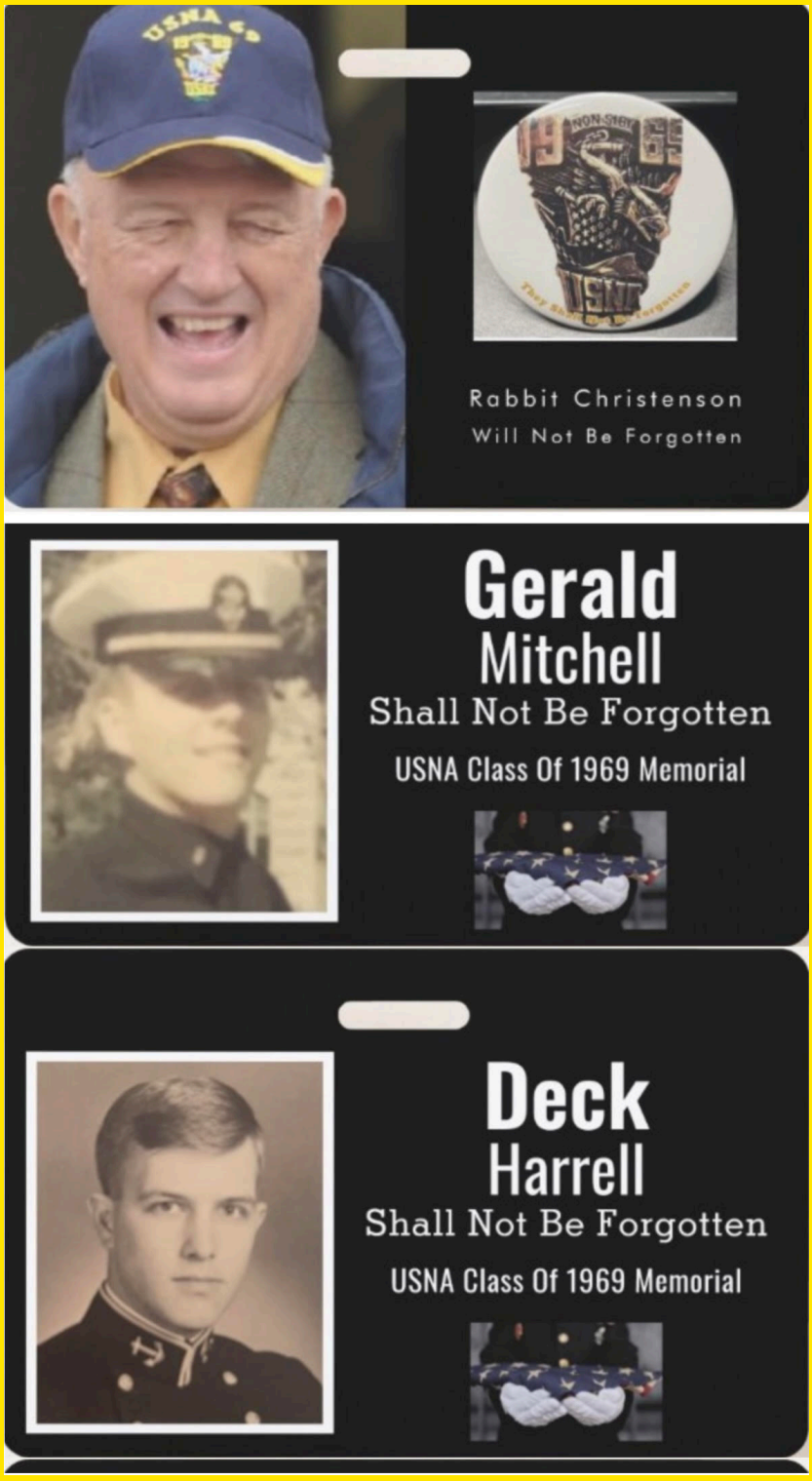
https://youtu.be/YFn2VhlctvY

6. USNA Class of 1969 Memorial Dedication, Part Six: **Christening, Part 2** by Sponsor, Planner, and Host Peter Blackledge, USNA'69. Peter presented to each of the Widows and Family Members of the Honored Deceased a special USNA'69-crested "They Shall Not Be Forgotten" Champagne Flute and USNA'69-crested "They Shall Not Be Forgotten" Lapel Pin which he had designed for the event (see pictures in attached Agenda) and Peter also provided special Gold Christening Cups with which each Widow of Family Member christened Memorial in the name of their deceased loved one, as Peter struck the Navy Brass Bell once after each name was called out (following the USA 9-11 Memorial tradition).

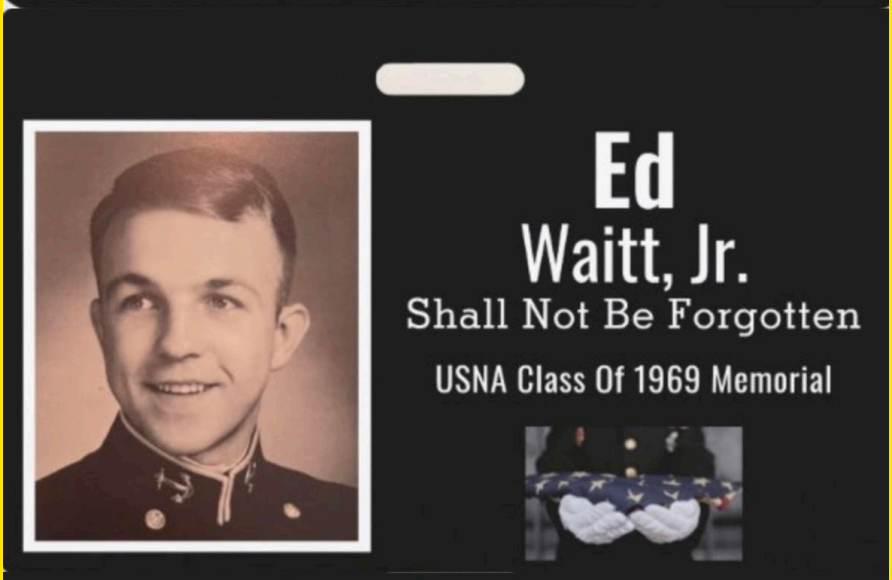
https://youtu.be/r1FLlSi-wrQ

Memorial Badges

Peter designed over 300 special Memorial Picture Badges of the Fallen and Deceased for Widows and Family Members to wear and to retain as a keepsake. These are some of those 300 Memorial Badges:



David
Montoya
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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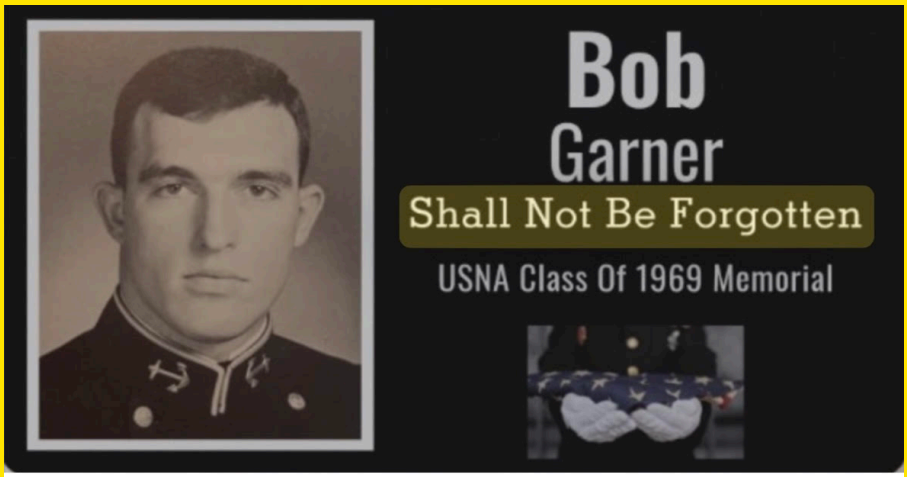
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial

Michael
Gembol
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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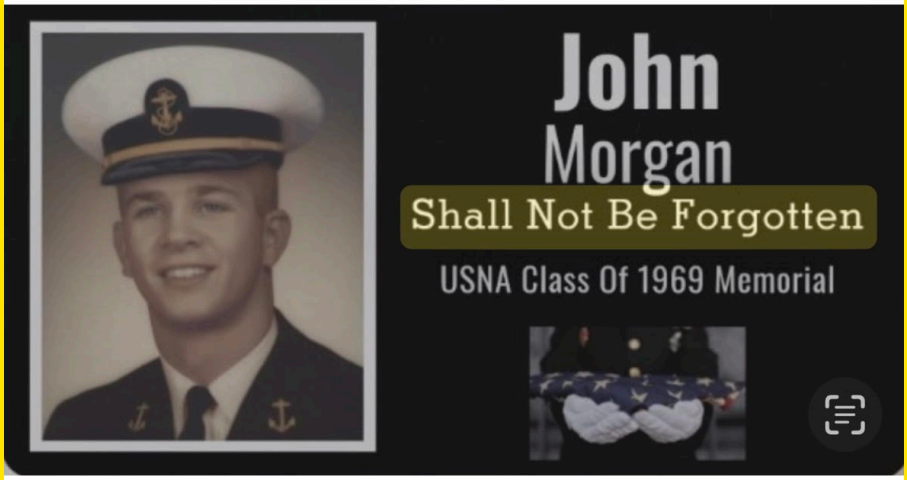
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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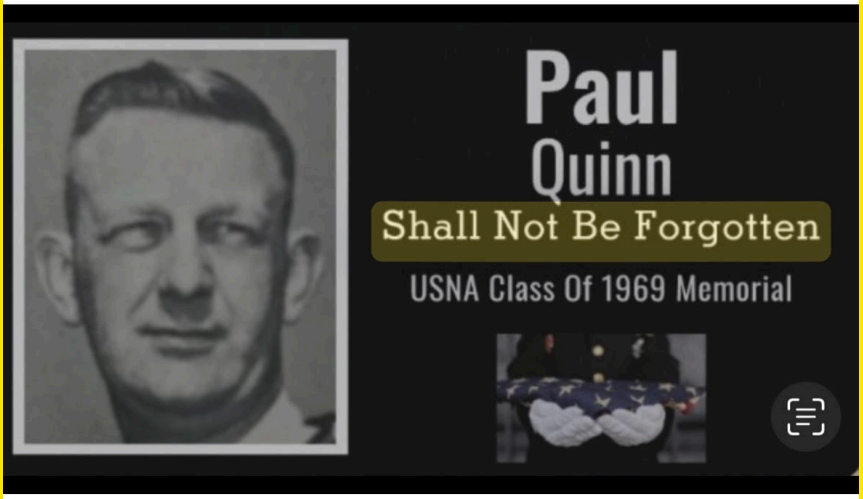
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial

Frank
Montesano
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial

Brett
Waterman
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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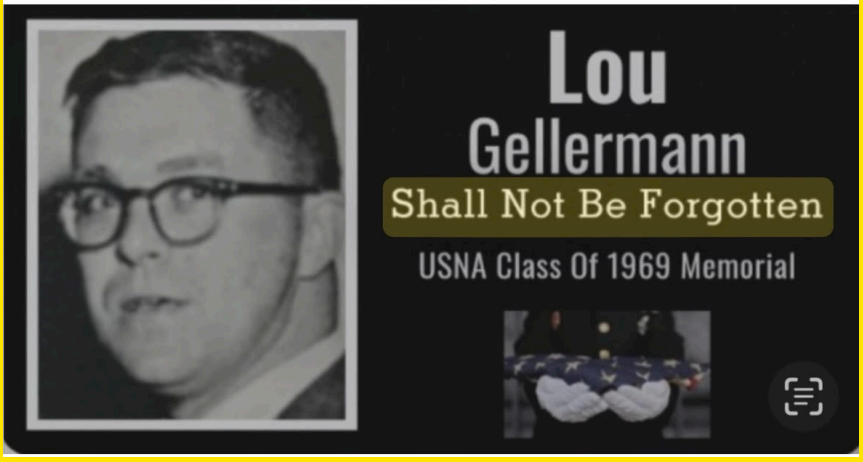
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial

Edward
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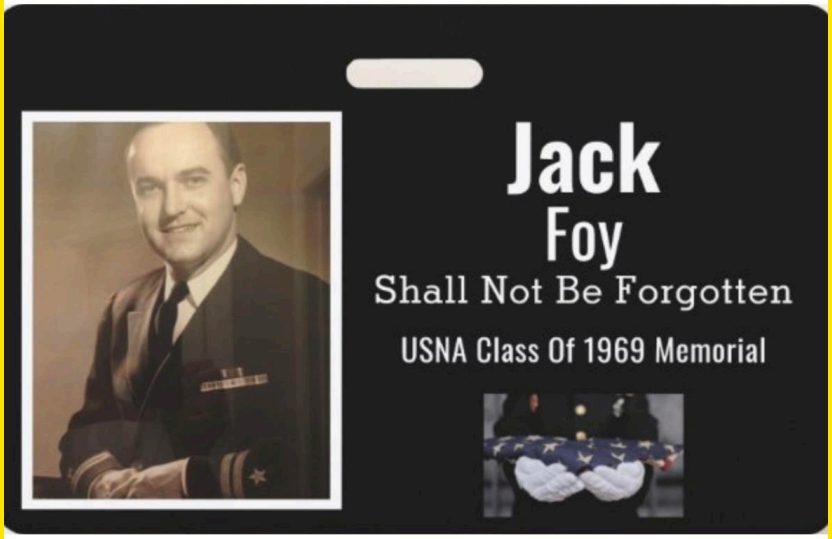
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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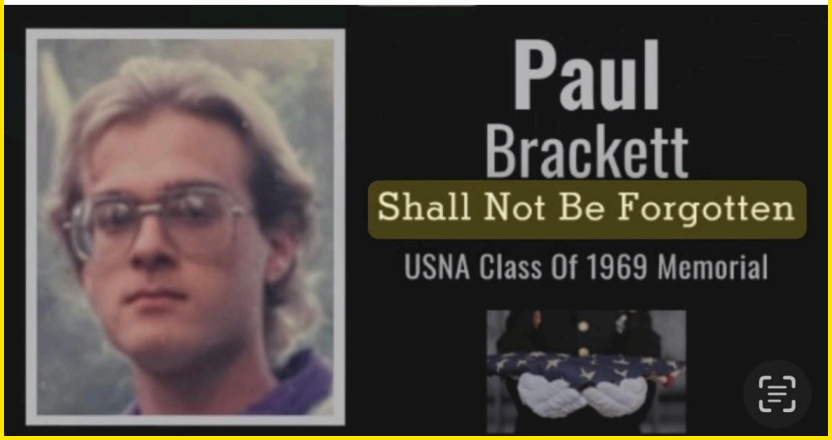
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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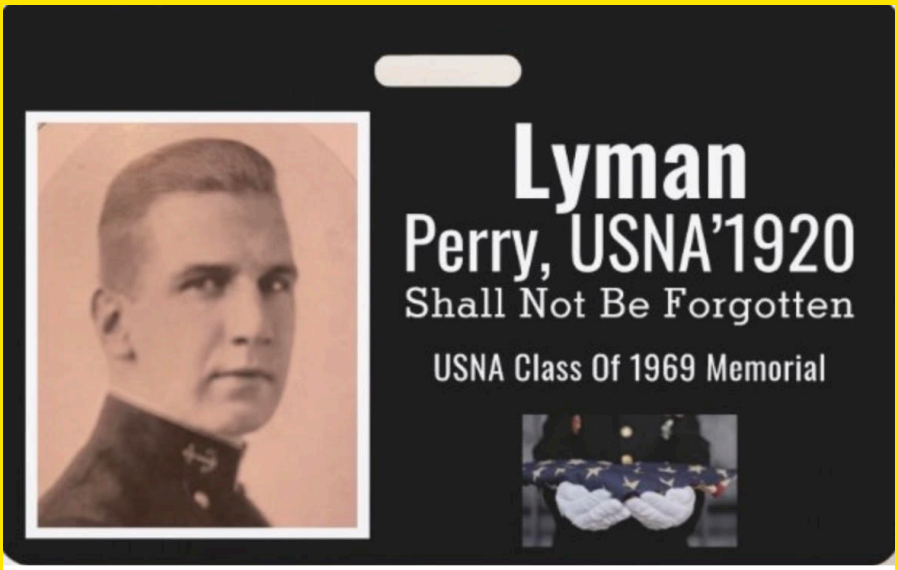
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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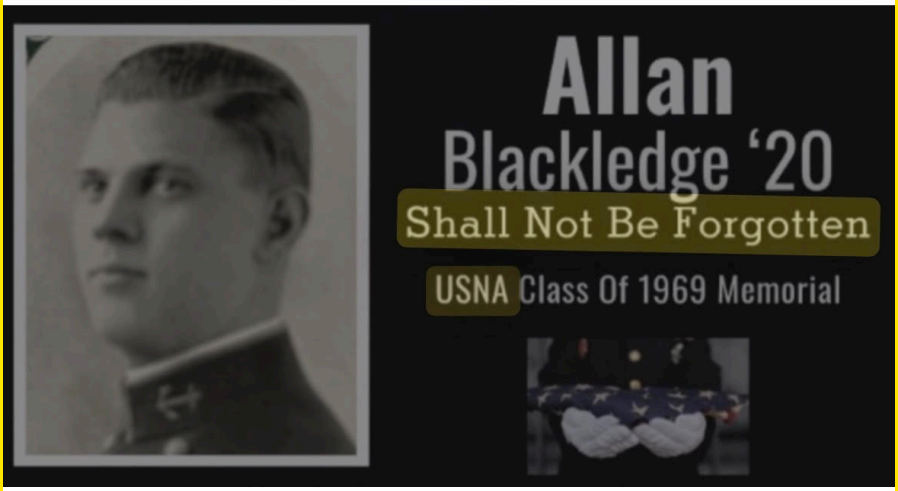
Perry, USNA'1920
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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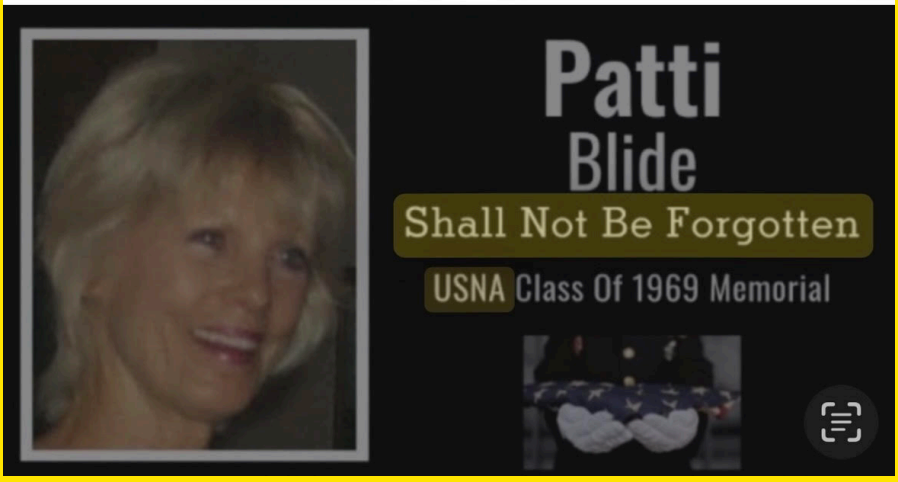
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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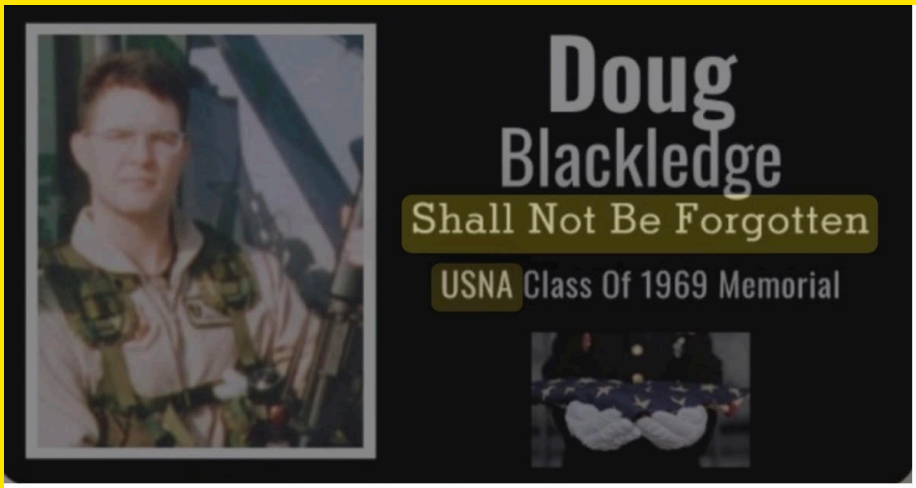
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial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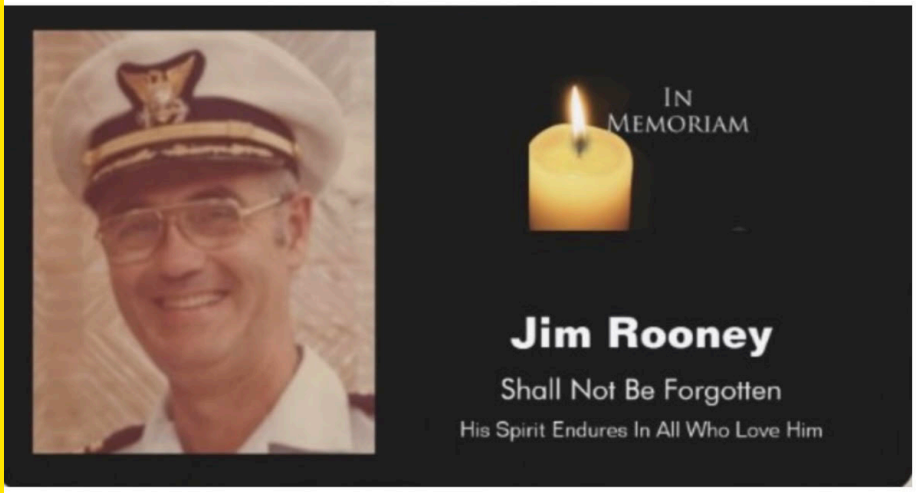
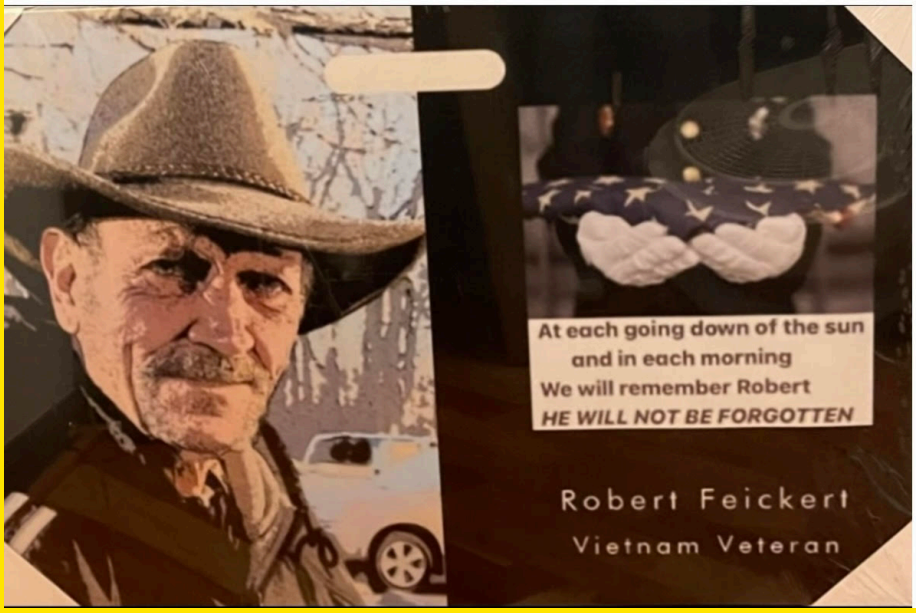
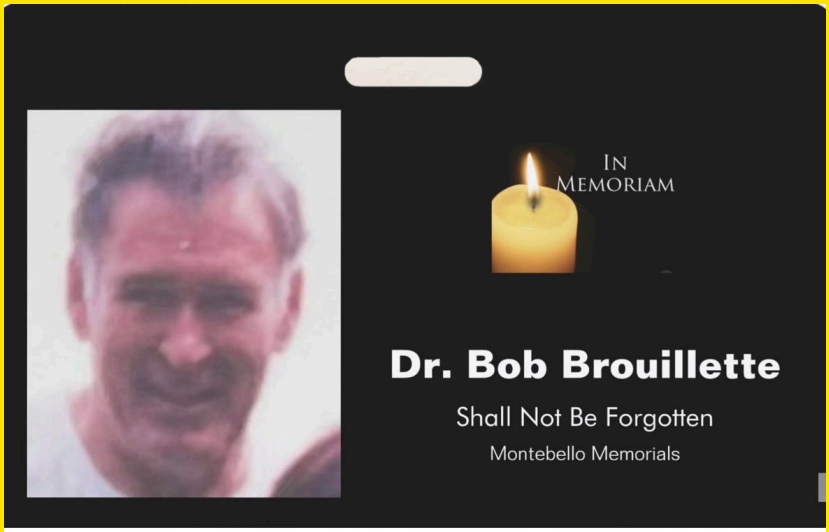
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial


IN
MEMORIAM
Jim Rooney
Shall Not Be Forgotten
His Spirit Endures In All Who Love Him

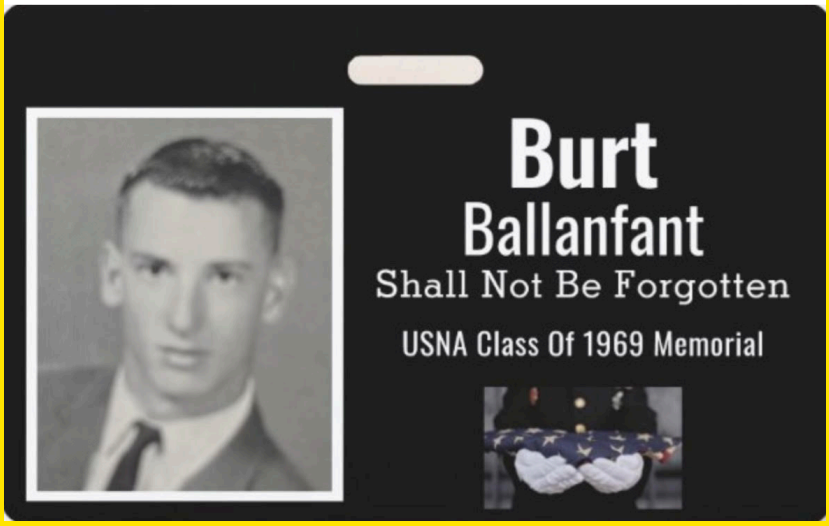

At each going down of the sun
and in each morning
We will remember Robert
HE WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN
Robert Feickert
Vietnam Veteran

In Memoriam
Kim Santos
Shall Not Be Forgotten
Montebello Memorials

In Memoriam
Tracy Ledbetter
Shall Not Be Forgotten
Montebello Memorials
In Memoriam
Carole Appel
Shall Not Be Forgotten
Montebello Memorials


In Memoriam
Dr. Bob Brouillette
Shall Not Be Forgotten
Montebello Memorials

Terry
Wyrick, Lamar65
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial


Burt
Ballanfant
Shall Not Be Forgotten
USNA Class Of 1969 Memorial

Activity Plan & Agenda

For

Dedication-Christening-Launch

"CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL"

Navy Crew Racing Shell

55th Anniversary Celebration Of USNA Class Of 1969

Hubbard Hall
United States Naval Academy (USNA)
August 30, 2024

Fulfilling A 155-Year USNA Tradition Of Honor

Developed by: Pete Blackledge, USNA'69 (Sponsor, Donor, and USNA'69 55th Anniversary "Activity Boss")
In Close Collaboration With Widows and Family Members Of Our USNA Deceased: Samara Bay, Mackie Christiansen, Linda Gembol, Honey Harrell, Carol McClane, Cheryl Miller, Jerald Mitchell, Sue Hathaway Mitchell, Joanne Montesano.
With Support From USNA'69 Classmates: John Collins, Rick Dempsey, Jim Hannemann, Tom Burbage. Note: These USNA'69 Classmates will stand in for Pete Blackledge if Pete is too weakened from his Cancer to perform his Host duties for this Activity.

Some of their review comments:

"Pete, Your Navy Crew Shell Memorial at the Naval Academy is a wonderful, caring expression, and it means a great deal to me. One of the hardest parts of losing Mitch is at times feeling alone and even forgotten. Your frequent contacts help make me feel remembered and special, and now looking forward to this Memorial really picks up my spirits when I get down. It's comforting to know that Mitch is remembered and honored. I am looking forward to being part of this amazing event." //s// Sue Hathaway Mitchell (Widow of USNA'69 Classmate Gerald Mitchell)

" Dear Peter, Wow! Wow! Wow! This is totally awesome, Peter! You never fail to deliver. Every imaginable and unimaginable detail is included. I appreciate the way you have merged honoring Michael and the other deceased with a joyful celebration of life. Michael would be exuberant if he were here and eager to launch the shell. Including the widows and the children in the ceremony also adds a particularly special touch.
Your dedication to the Academy, Peter, warms the heart. You are indeed the "change you wish to see" in our world, always reaching out to impact the lives of humankind. And here you are, Peter,

a shining example of how God works miracles in 2024, as you continue healing from your battle with cancer. With gratitude," //s// Linda Gembol (Widow of USNA'69 Classmate Mike Gembol)

✍️"Pete, This is a uniquely meaningful way of recognizing those who have gone before us by dedicating, christening and launching the "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" Navy Crew Racing Shell in their honor." //s// Jerald F. "Mitch" Mitchell, USNA'69 (Twin Brother of Deceased USNA'69 Classmate Gerald Mitchell)

✍️" Dear Peter, I think you have checked all the blocks for the christening of the Class of 1969 shell. This event that you have single handedly launched will add a meaningful moment to the 55th reunion. It will be another opportunity for the classmates to gather and restrengthen the camaraderie. God bless your heart for all your work and your kindness of thinking of my dear Rabbit." //s// Mackie Christensen (Widow of USNA'69 Classmate RADM "Rabbit" Christensen)

✍️"Pete, what a great plan- I fully support." //s// Tom Burbage, USNA'69

✍️"Pete, I understand the importance of the event and appreciate your vision and dedication. I am committed to help make this a successful, memorable, and fun event." //s// John Collins, USNA'69

✍️**"Pete - Your program should provide a heartfelt and splendid testimonial event for both widows and families of those being honored by this Memorial Shell, as well as our classmates and teammates." //s// Rick Dempsey, USNA'69**

Agenda

<u>1:30pm-2:30pm: Celebration Of Life To Honor USNA'69 Fallen & Deceased</u>

- Gathering To Remember Our Deceased Classmates And Joyfully Celebrate The Times We Shared -

Events

 Distribution By Pete Blackledge Of Embossed Gloss-Metal 3-Inch USNA’69-Crested “They Shall Not Be Forgotten” Lapel Pins To All Attendees

 Streaming via Bose Sound System by Pete Blackledge of USNA’69 “100 Top Hits Of 1960s” Playlist

⚓Live Performance By Bob “Cat” Cannan (USNA’72), the former Lead Singer and Lead Guitarist of USNA’s iconic rock band “The Spiffys”. “Singalongs” will be invited!!!
Bob is the only musical artist other than Cher to have been invited to perform aboard a U.S.

2:30pm-3:30pm: Dedication-Christening-Launch of “CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL” To Honor USNA’69 Fallen And Deceased
- Honoring Our Deceased By Establishing A Tangible And Enduring Memorial To Their Legacy

Events

As Participants Are Taking Their Seats: Streaming via Bose Sound System by Pete Blackledge of USNA Glee Clubs Musical Performance From Senator McCain's Funeral

Welcome and Dedication by Pete Blackledge, USNA'69, Sponsor, Donor, and USNA'69 55th Anniversary Activities Boss
"This "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" Navy Crew Racing Shell is dedicated to honoring "The Great Class Of 1969" and recognizing the deceased Classmates, Teammates, Coaches, and Family Members of the USNA'69 Donors who made this MEMORIAL possible. It particularly honors the 17 Fallen USNA'69 Classmates (denoted by **next to their names) who gave their last full measure of devotion to our nation. As immortalized in the "For The Fallen" words of Lawrence Binyon: *"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them."* Non Sibi Sed Patriae"**

Invocation by Norm Brown, USNA'69, USNA Class of 1969 Chaplain

Opening Comments, Importance Of This Gift, Recognition of Donors and Contributors, and Thanks by Robert Friedrich, USNA Director of Rowing

Recognition of Donors: Pete Blackledge, John Collins, Rick Dempsey, Tom Burbage, Pete Renfree, Jim Hannemann

 Presentation by Pete Blackledge of any special honors received, potentially including USA Flag flown over the U.S. Capital to honor this event. Following is an example of one of the special honors obtained and presented by Pete Blackledge at the October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell:

"At the request of the Honorable Donald S. Beyer, Jr., Member of Congress, this flag was flown to celebrate the christening and launch of the United States Naval Academy (USNA) Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell. Furthermore, this flag is to recognize the 50th Anniversary of USNA Class of 1969…"

 Presentation by Pete Blackledge of individual Embossed Glass USNA'69 Crested "They Shall Not Be Forgotten" Champagne Flutes to Widows and Family Members of Deceased

 Christening of "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" Navy Crew Racing Shell

Pete Blackledge will individually provide a Gold Christening Cup to each participating attendee, beginning with the Widows and Family Members of our Deceased. Participants will each scoop ceremonial water from the historic USNA Championship Bowl, and pour that water over the bow of "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" in remembrance and honor of their deceased. Participants will be invited to call out the name of their deceased as they christen "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" in the name of their beloved deceased. As each name is called out, Pete Blackledge will strike the U.S. Navy bronze bell once for each name which is called out, following the legacy of the USA 9-11 Memorial dedication.

 Launch of "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" Navy Crew Racing Shell.

Pete Blackledge and other Members of the USNA'69 Varsity Heavyweight Rowing Team will accompany Members of the Current USNA Varsity Rowing Team in carrying "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" to the water. Members of the Current USNA Varsity Rowing Team will then row "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" in Exposition for event attendees. During this Exposition, Pete Blackledge will play a recording of USNA Glee Club's performance of The Navy Hymn: "Eternal Father", and attendees will be invited to join in the singing.

Conclusion and Group Pictures

 USNA'69 Class and Individual USNA'69 Companies and other participating groups such as USS ALBANY (CG-10) 1969-1974 Junior Officers will be able to have group pictures taken. Following are examples of pictures taken by the Navy Photographer at the October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of *Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell:*

USNA'69 Class Picture taken at October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell (part of the 150 Activity participants)

USNA'69 16th Company Group Picture taken at October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell

⚓ **USS ALBANY (CG-10) 1969-1974 Junior Officers & Spouses Group Picture taken at October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell**

USNA'69 Individual Pictures (Below are some of the MicroThumbNails from the 980 pictures taken by the Navy Photographer at October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of the "Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell". If any of the 150 participants at the October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of the "Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell" would like a full-size picture of themselves or others from that 2019 event, contact Pete Blackledge)

This 2024 USNA'69 55th Anniversary Activity will facilitate the further establishment and dissemination of the unique, distinguished legacy of "The Great Class Of 1969", as was done in the below USNA Navy Crew Newsletter which was published and widely disseminated by USNA following the October2019 Dedication-Christening-Launch of "Class of 1969 Navy Crew Racing Shell" for the 2019 50th Anniversary of USNA'69.

NAVY CREW NEWSLETTER

Fall Season | www.navysports.com | November 2019

Peter Blackledge '69 Shell Dedication

Shell Dedicated to the Class of 1969 and Tribute to History of Navy Crew

On a beautiful Friday morning in late October, on the occasion of the 50th Reunion of the Class of 1969, Hubbard Hall hosted the boat christening of the "Peter Blackledge '69." The shell, generously donated by Peter Blackledge'69, who spoke at the dedication, will also bear the crest of the Class of 1969 and the class motto: "Non Sibi Sed Patriae." The shell forms part of a long tradition of support for Navy Crew by the Blackledge family: the last shell the family donated to the program in honor of Blackledge's father, the "CAPT Allan Blackledge," still hangs in trophy room of Hubbard Hall.

The new Blackledge shell will be the latest addition to the Heavyweight Fleet, and its dedication provided an opportunity to mark a number of momentous anniversaries: the 50th Anniversary of Blackledge's own Class of 1969, the 100th Anniversary of his father's own USNA graduation, and of course the 150th Anniversary of Crew at the Naval Academy. To mark the occasion, there were alumni on hand from many of Navy's most historic crews: the 1960 Olympic Eight, the 1963 Plebe Eight, the 1965 IRA "Clean Sweep" crew, the 1967 JV IRA Champions, the 1971 Eastern Sprint Champion Varsity, and—of course—many members of the Class of 1969 Plebe and Varsity crews who had rowed with Blackledge under Coach Carl Ullrich.

The ceremony's distinguished guests also included members of the Blackledge family, a number of retired flag officers from both the Navy and Marine Corps with whom Blackledge worked during his time in the Fleet and with the Department of the Navy, as well as shipmates from Blackledge's service aboard the USS Albany.

Following Blackledge's remarks about his family's history with the Navy and his own recollections about rowing Navy Crew, all of these guests and former Navy Oarsmen were invited up to take part in the christening ceremony. Each participant had the opportunity to use a special, commemorative Christening Cup to pour the traditional "Severn Finish Line" water on the shell, before Blackledge himself completed the ceremony, emptying the 1918 National Championship Trophy over the bow of Navy Crew's newest shell.

With the speeches and christening complete, a crew of Firsties took the "Blackledge" to the water for the first time, rowing it past the dock and the assembled throng of well-wishers to welcome it officially to the Navy Crew fleet. The "Peter Blackledge '69" will now take its place in the Heavyweight Shell Bay, ready to carry Navy oarsman into the spring racing campaign in just a few short months.

For RSVP and Additional Information, please contact Pete Blackledge, USNA'69 (Sponsor, Donor, and USNA'69 55th Anniversary "Activity Boss" for "CLASS OF 1969 MEMORIAL" Navy Crew Racing Shell)

PETER D. BLACKLEDGE
UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY
CLASS OF 1969

5901 MOUNT EAGLE DRIVE, SUITE 905
ALEXANDRIA, VA 22303
LONGTALLTEXAN@ICLOUD.COM
703-915-4046

Peter Blackledge Is Specially Surprise-Honored By His Montebello “Dancing At Dusk” Dance Students at New Years

https://youtu.be/-v23przYyV8

Peter “Dr. Dance” Blackledge Provides A Public Service Announcement Appealing For A Cure To The Devastating Case Of “Can’t-Dance-Al-Gore-Syndrome” Which Had Tragically Struck Laura’s Sister Alison

https://youtu.be/uzc_GhZ-ykc

Peter Blackledge Planned, Coordinated, And Led Montebello's First MMMVFS Military Veterans Celebration Of Memorial Day, 2023. It includes brief stirring personal interviews arranged by Peter and conducted by "The Times Of Montebello " staff with Montebello Residents who were in, or had loved ones in, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, or other major conflicts.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FivzZsucpMg

Peter Blackledge Planned, Coordinated, And Led Montebello's Historic First-Ever Celebration Of National Vietnam War Veterans Day, On The 50th Anniversary Of The Event

Vietnam War Veterans Day 50th Anniversary Celebration - part 1

Vietnam War Veterans Day 50th Anniversary Celebration - part 2

Peter & Laura: A Bears' Retrospective

https://youtu.be/MYQCGp47pps

Lamar '65 Champagne & Pizza Party

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPFh4UBFTY4

Laura’s Birthday Surprise Chauffeured Limo

Peter Blackledge Memorial Video - Birthday Limo

Peter & Laura (aka "The Beatle Bears") make their musical debut with an original video honoring Chicago Celebrity Alison's birthday.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmJqKNlk7LE

Laura’s Birthday Surprise # 2 “Work Colleagues”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNWn81y0aEk

Peter Blackledge Memorial Video, Most Beloved Sibling Contest (1992)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWEJXr2cTXQ

Abigail Wishes, “Please Get Well, Peter”

Abigail Wishes, "Please Get Well, Peter" - part 1

Abigail Wishes, "Please Get Well, Peter" - part 2

Peter Blackledge Memorial Video: Exposition of US Naval Academy Racing Shell "PETER BLACKLEDGE, '69"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzlNRC5Q9dM

A Habit Of
Thoughtfulness:
Peter's Joyful Giving
To Family & Friends

What I Want You To Know About Peter's Joyful Giving

One of Peter's particularly endearing qualities is the joy he feels in conceptualizing, designing, and producing special surprise gifts for our family members and close friends. It is such a blessed trait of Peter's that I wanted to devote this full chapter to a few of the examples I've observed during our 21 years together.

Peter Very Touchingly Honored
The Beautiful Couple Doug And Sharon

Peter always felt that his wonderful friends Vice Admiral Doug and Sharon Katz had a uniquely beautiful love and marriage. As they now entered their eighties, Doug (United States Naval Academy Class of 1965) started having some serious health challenges. Peter wanted to do something to express his affection for them, and his deep respect for their love and marriage. Peter had first sent to them a recording of the romantic Percy Faith theme song to the movie "A Summer Place" - which Peter recalled was the movie which Doug and Sharon saw together on their first "falling in love" date. Peter wrote in his email to Sharon accompanying the song that he hoped "listening to that romantic song would help transport you back to the sweet memories of your initial dating and courtship with Doug." Sharon's email response expressed her great gratitude to Peter, and said to Peter "We will enjoy 'A Summer Place' tomorrow as we sip our coffee and read the news."

Sharon's response about their morning ritual - of sipping their coffee and reading the news together - gave Peter the idea of crafting romantic memory mugs from which Doug and Sharon could sip their morning coffee together.

It was truly a joy for Peter to research and craft those mugs, because it was a way that he could contribute to Doug and Sharon's daily celebration of those sweet morning moments. Peter was able through research to find a picture of Doug and Sharon emerging from the magnificent Naval Academy Chapel beneath the crossed swords of Doug's classmates following their wedding, and a second charming picture of Doug and Sharon in their later years together. Peter matched those pictures with the initial line Peter always loved from the tender 1864 poem by Robert Browning "Grow old with me, the best is yet to be / The last of life, for which the first was made." Here are the front and back sides of the resultant two coffee mugs which Peter crafted:

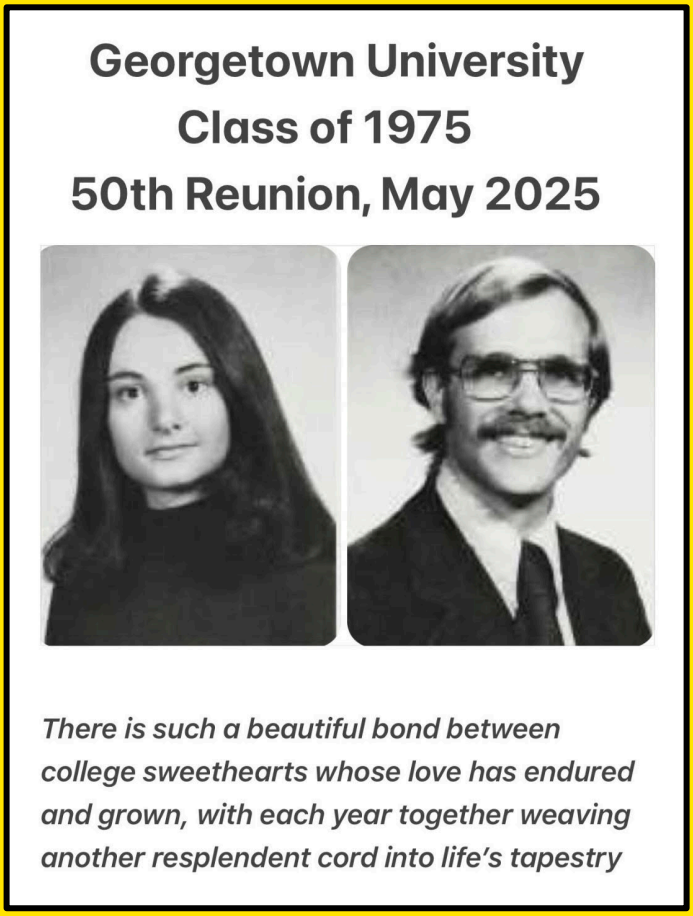
Peter's thought was their contemplating those sweet pictures from their life, and those romantic words - as they share quiet time together each morning while they "sip their coffee and read the news" - might further enhance those precious daily moments which they share together.

Sharon's response after receiving those mugs was so very beautiful, touching and heartwarming to both Peter and me:

" Peter, we are speechless. The incredible mugs arrived today and you had both of us in tears. They are more than special and will be used every morning. How on earth did you find that wedding photo? You are beyond unbelievable. We are shocked, stunned, but so grateful. How we wish we could do something as special for you and Laura. You know Peter, Doug was a gift from GOD to me and vice versa, so having our wedding photo on coffee mugs is truly the ultimate gift. How on earth did you ever think of that? Those mugs are more than a treasure….you captured our lives and our love.
Hugs and love to you, and to Laura,
Sharon"

Alison's and Steve's
50th College Reunion

When my sister Alison and her husband Steve were coming to visit us as part of their journey back to Georgetown University for the 50th Reunion of their Class of 1975, Peter wanted to craft a special present for them. Peter began work on conceptualizing possible unique gifts, and after several trials that were not fruitful, he identified one which could work. Peter implemented this concept by searching online until he found Alison's and Steve's Georgetown University Class of 1975 photos, merged their two photos onto a single image, had that merged image mounted on a beautiful slab of black slate along with special words which Peter wrote about Alison's and Steve's fifty years together, and had that black slate slab mounted on a black wooden stand. Here is Peter's work result:


Georgetown University
Class of 1975
50th Reunion, May 2025
There is such a beautiful bond between college sweethearts whose love has endured and grown, with each year together weaving another resplendent cord into life's tapestry

Peter then wrote the following email to Alison and Steve:

Dearest Alison and Steve,

Fifty years ago, your love story had just begun. Yours is such a beautiful story: Two college sweethearts, who have endured in their love for fifty years, now returning to their fifty-year college reunion to celebrate with their classmates. I was so deeply touched that I wanted to provide you with a special gift, with my written words of tribute, to help commemorate this wonderful occasion.

Although my Cancer treatment precludes my meeting with you during your Montebello visit tomorrow, I've asked Laura to present you with my gift.

With great admiration, and sharing in your joy,
Peter

Alison and Steve were deeply touched by Peter's very thoughtful gift, and stated that it was the highlight of their 50th Anniversary.

Making Vickey The "Birthday Girl"

Peter loves bringing joy to others by remembering and celebrating their birthdays. He became dedicated to this as a result of his years of volunteer church work with children who have Down Syndrome and other disabilities. I have written about this in a later chapter, as follows:

"But for me as a woman and Peter's Life Partner, what truly makes my heart gasp with love and joy is the extraordinary depth of Peter's warmth, love, caring, tenderness, gentleness, and softness … I have witnessed the softness of Peter's spirit calming and elevating the most despondent individual. I saw that particularly when Peter invited me to join him in his church's outreach volunteer work with Wellspring for kids who have Down Syndrome and other disabilities. The one example which still brings tears to my eyes was when we were assisting in a Wellspring group Bible study, and one of the little girls had left the group and was crying alone in the corner of the room. No one else noticed her, but Peter immediately did. Peter gently approached her, and softly asked her: "Cindy, you can you share with me why you are sad?" Cindy tearfully replied, through chocking sobs "Today is my birthday, and no one remembered". After providing comforting words to Cindy, Peter gathered the entire Wellspring group together to surround and embrace Cindy with a "Love Bomb" group hug and together sing "Happy Birthday Cindy." Cindy's countenance immediately brightened to a laughing smile, as she basked in the recognition and love of her group friends. Peter's experience with Cindy made him concerned that other Wellspring children might similarly be forgotten on their birthdays. So he obtained a list of all the Wellspring children's birthdays, designed a red t-shirt with the title "Wellspring Birthday Herald", and instituted the practice of his heralding each Wellspring child's birthday by making a dramatic entrance wearing that red t-shirt while honking a large horn and singing Happy Birthday to whomever had a birthday, and then presenting a birthday cake, ice cream, and birthday hat to that person to ensure they were fully remembered and celebrated. What other man would feel so deeply and care so fully?"

But when Peter invited others at a hair salon he frequented to join him in celebrating the birthday of that salon's co-owner ,Vickey, he received immediate responses which ranged from caution to fear. Apparently, Vickey had made it well known that she did not want her birthday celebrated or remembered - and although Vickey was a very sweet and kind person, everyone know that "you don't mess with Vickey". But because Peter had developed a very warm and friendly relationship with Vickey, he decided to take the chance - albeit using a gradual, incremental approach before Peter launched into his usual "Go Big, 200%" celebrations. So Peter started with his characteristically grand and over-the-top birthday remembrances in celebrating the birthday of the woman who washed hair at the salon - with Vickey very happily participating.

Then, Peter moved up to celebrating the birthdays of Vickey's fellow salon co-owner, Michelle, and her beautiful daughters Shelby and Courtney - again with Vickey joyfully participating.

Now, with Vickey fully acclimated to Peter's OMG-level birthday celebrations, Peter - with some trepidation - was prepared to initiate Vickey into Peter's "Go Big" birthday celebrations. The first element was having a large, beautiful floral arrangement delivered to Vickey. Then, Peter festooned Vickey's salon station with a large Happy Birthday balloon, birthday plates, colorful crepe paper, roses, a "Birthday Girl Award Ribbon", a birthday cake, celebratory noise makers, and a large hand-inscribed "Happy Birthday Vickey" sign. And then Peter waited - with fear and trembling - to see Vickey's reaction when she came in and "beheld the full majesty" of Peter's "Happy Birthday Vickey" celebration. Peter was so relieved when Vickey came in, loved it, and couldn't stop laughing. Success!!!!

Following that “breaking the Happy Birthday Vickey ice”, Peter would address Vickey as “Birthday Girl” every time he saw her, and Vickey always gave Peter a happy glowing smile in response. Peter then make Vickey’s new moniker official by having a “Birthday Girl” sash and crown delivered to Vickey, to which Vickey joyfully responded by texting Peter the below Selfie of herself modeling the “Birthday Girl” sash and crown, and added her text words “Peter, Thank you so much for all you do to make my birthdays so special. I’m blessed with your kindness. You are the first and only person who has been able to make me enjoy my birthday!”

Honoring The Memory Of Olivia

When the beloved dog of Peter's Music Producer friend, David, died, David was deeply saddened. Peter expressed his sincere sympathy to David, and asked David if there were anything Peter could do. David responded that he was setting up a Memorial for Olivia in his home, and invited Peter to contribute. In support of his friend David, and in honor of Olivia's memory, Peter obtained a picture of Olivia, wrote very beautiful words in memory of Olivia - including weaving in some words about "sweet song" and "beautiful memory" which Peter knew would particularly resonate with Music Producer David - and had the picture and Peter's very touching words framed on artist canvas.

In Memory Of Olivia

No matter how bad my day,
you always made me smile.
You gave me the most joyful greetings,
and now the hardest goodbye.
Though your sweet song has ended,
your beautiful melody endures.

Dave was ecstatically appreciative, and made Peter's canvas artwork the centerpiece of his Memorial.

Annapolis Tributes,
Russian Poetry,
& A Swiss Music Box

Michael Gembol was a close friend of Peter's at the Naval Academy. They were classmates, Varsity Heavyweight Rowing teammates, and in 1967 together became Intercollegiate Rowing Association 2V8 National Champions.

HONORING
THE USNA 1967 2V8 IRA
NATIONAL CHAMPION TEAM
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
(Sports Illustrated)
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
Spoils enroute to Crabtown lockers.
(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)
Navy coxswain heads for watery ceremonial.
USNA Navy Crew Honor: On 17 June 1967, in front of 15,000 crew fans, the 1967 USNA 2V8 dramatically & decisively won its IRA Regatta of 14 top rowing colleges— beating nearest competitor Penn by a full two lengths, and having even more open water on Wisconsin, Cornell, Washington, Syracuse, California, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Princeton, UCLA, Brown, Northeastern, and Stanford—bringing the Kennedy Challenge Trophy back to USNA for the fifth time in history. (Intercollegiate Rowing Association and Syracuse Herald-American)
Penn's sweep of Regatta spoiled by Navy
(The New York Times, Syracuse Herald-American)
(Peter Douglas Blackledge)

After graduation, Michael married the beautiful Linda Grainger in a stunning wedding at Church of Scotland in Strone, Scotland. Michael and Linda lovingly raised their three extraordinary daughters - Ktimene, Caitlin, and Nadya - and were blessed with five grandchildren.

In Memoriam: Michael P. Gembol, USNA '69

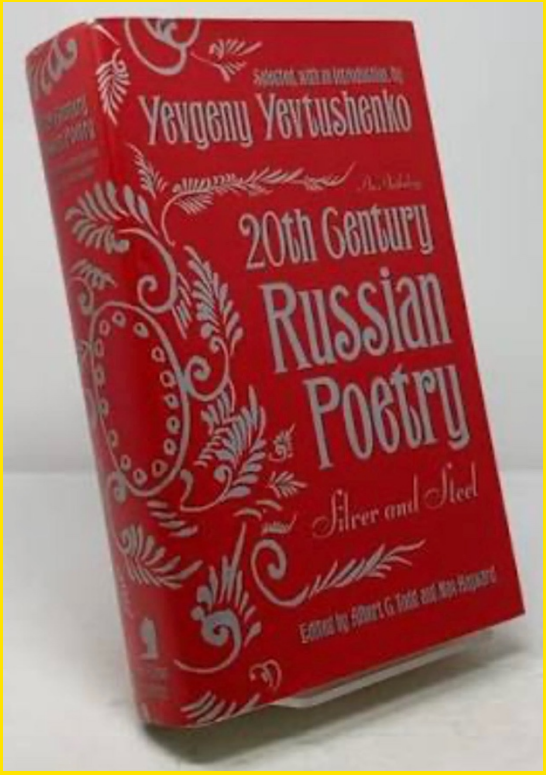
A man whose gifts, interests, and passions spanned the gamut, Michael was an intellectual, an artist, an athlete, a writer, an inventor, a linguist, an engineer, an enthusiast of classical music, and much more. He spent his life developing his abundant talents. At the Naval Academy, Michael engaged in challenging academics as well as vigorous athletics. Upon graduation, he devoted ten years to Admiral Rickover's Nuclear Navy. Following his departure from the Navy, Michael spent thirty-three years in the power industry, leaving his footprints around the globe. As an energy consultant, adviser, and educator, he improved energy production and increased operational efficiency for not fewer than eleven countries. At the time of his death, he was pursuing a plan to reduce global CO2 emissions through green building technology. As devoted as Michael was to his professions, he always found time for his passions - the Russian language, art, and swimming. Michael studied Russian in high school, and he seized the opportunity to further that interest at the Academy. Over the years, he took great pleasure in committing to memory the entirety of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, and he delighted in the chance to recite the opera in verse to any listening ears. Also a gifted artist, Michael left behind numerous portraits and oil paintings. Family and friends cherish these creations. Along with his academic and artistic endeavors, Michael was an athlete. Crediting his coach at Columbus High School in Nebraska with instilling in him a lifelong interest in swimming, Michael spent five decades enjoying the sport. He swam an average of three miles a day, occasionally up to seven, and was achieving personal records in his sixties. Michael married Linda Grainger Gembol in 1978. They have three bright and beautiful daughters and three grandchildren so far. If Michael were with us, he would proudly tell you of some of their accomplishments. He would delight in hearing your stories about him from his days at the Academy, particularly if they involved disobedience or snakes. But he would not have dwelled for long on the past. More than anything, he would have wanted to share his big ideas for the future and to hear about yours.

Fueled by an unreasonable amount of chocolate ice cream, Michael's brain was designed to solve complex problems. Bridging concepts to create novel solutions enthralled him. In a loathsome irony, Michael's magnificent mind became afflicted with cancer. He succumbed to glioblastoma in 2014. Michael always cherished his time rowing on the U. S. Naval Academy Varsity Crew Team. And so it is indeed fitting that he now overlooks the Severn River, cheering Navy Crew to victory.

Sadly, Michael was struck with deadly glioblastoma in 2014. Peter reached out to Linda to support her in her grief, but he wanted to do more. Accordingly, Peter invited Linda and her family to be Guests Of Honor at the 2019 United States Naval Academy dedication ceremony for the christening and launching of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell at the Naval Academy's historic Hubbard Hall. At that ceremony, Peter provided Linda and her family four surprises: (1) Peter arranged for Linda and her family to christen the "PETER BLACKLEDGE '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell in Michael's name, by scooping ceremonial water from the Naval Academy's vintage National Champions trophy bowl, and pouring that "sacred" water over the shell's bow as they called out Michael's name; (2) Peter had worked with Linda to write the above special tribute to Michael. Peter included that written tribute in the historic Navy

Blue and Gold Commemorative Program which Peter authored and had the Naval Academy publish as a Keepsake for the ceremony; (3) Peter devoted a significant portion of his Dedication Speech at that 2019 ceremony to sharing with the 150 ceremony attendees the wonderful story and charming anecdotes of Michael Gembol's life; (4) Peter arranged with the Naval Academy's Director of Rowing to have Michael's name permanently inscribed on the interior of MEMORIAL, thereby ensuring that Michael will be parted from the rowing shell, which honors him and his teammates. Linda said she and her family were deeply touched and very grateful.

Subsequently, Peter continued frequent encouragement communications with Linda, establishing a "Michael-Gembol-centered" friendship and bringing Linda into Peter's and my family. Knowing the special bond which Linda and Michael shared over Russian poetry, Peter surprised Linda with this heirloom book of Russian poetry.



During their many phone conversations, Peter would often address Linda as “Sunshine” to remind her of the joy which she brought into the lives of her children and all who knew her. Peter was able to find and have delivered to Linda a burnished solid walnut Swiss music box which was inscribed with the words “You Are My Sunshine”, and which delightfully played that tune when opened.

Linda said she was deeply touched, thanked Peter for his thoughtfulness, and wrote “You are prayers answered. I am blessed to have you in my life.”

Huckleberry For President

When Peter wanted to give my high school friend Ann a special surprise gift, he conceptualized doing that by bringing together Ann's two loves - Politics and her adorable dog "Huckleberry" - by designing and producing this special political campaign button:

Ann couldn't stop laughing, and proudly wears her campaign button everywhere.

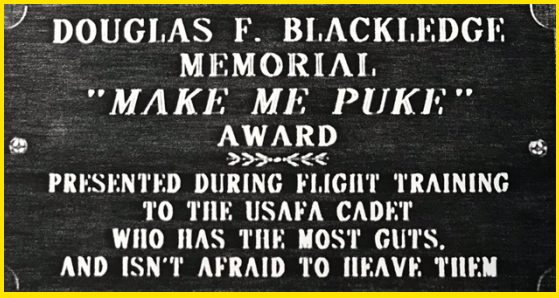
Encouraging Gary

Peter always thoughtfully put others before himself. Even though Peter was very sick with Cancer and debilitating Chemotherapy, Peter took the time to support fellow Montebello neighbor, Gary, by celebrating Gary's each little improvement after Gary's serious fall. When Gary was finally able to walk a few steps, Peter sent Gary an Olympic Walking medal. And when Gary finally started making progress in his physical therapy, Peter sent Gary a mounted canvas picture of Gary wearing his Olympic Walking medal and with the title "Olympic Gold Medalist" and the inspirational quote: ***"Don't put a limit on anything. The more you dream, the further you get."*** Multiple Olympic Gold Medalist Michael Phelps

Gary De Vight
Olympic Gold Medalist
"Don't put a limit on anything.
The more you dream, the further you get."
Multiple Olympic Gold Medalist Michael Phelps

“Make Me Puke” Award

Peter’s nephew - Doug Blackledge - is a United States Air Force Academy graduate, and a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Air Force. Peter would playfully razz Doug as being the “Black Sheep Of The Blackledge Family” for attending what Peter’s father jocularly called “The Colorado Springs Prep School” instead of the United States Naval Academy, as Doug’s father, grandfather and Uncle had done. Doug was a Champion Wrestler in high school, and a model of physical and mental toughness. When Doug went through Flight Training, he felt he was more than tough enough to handle whatever his Flight Instructor could throw at him. So Doug issued the ultimate challenge to his Flight Instructor: “I bet you can’t make me puke.” Big mistake. By the end of that first flight, Doug had turned totally green and had ejected every morsel of food he had ingested for the previous two meals - making the inside of his cockpit look like a culinary Rorschach Test. Peter felt that this “Teachable Moment” needed to be immortalized. Peter tracked down a very realistic plasticized imitation of vomit and had it professionally mounted on a beautiful wooden ceremonial plaque above a official-looking brass plate - which Peter had inscribed with the following words:



Scenes From Our
Beautiful Love Story:
Decades Sustained By
Caring, Communication & Commitment

What I Want You
To Know About Peter

Peter is the most wonderful man I have ever known. He's definitely the smartest person I know, and beyond that Peter is thoughtful, kind, and considerate; a man who is always happy, and spreads that happiness to everyone. In my family and beyond, Peter is loved as the guy who always remembers everyone's birthday, and always remembers them in the way which is most unique to that person - making each person feel special and loved.

I've given many examples earlier in this book showing Peter's amazing dedication to every endeavor he undertakes, and the many formidable challenges which Peter has surmounted: the skinny, unathletic kid who was always chosen last for neighborhood sports teams, who became a United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman and an Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) 2V8 National Champion; the kid who was always picked on, who became a recognized Judo and Karate practitioner training under World Karate Champion Chuck Norris; the kid who always had "two left feet who became a Disco, Latin, and Salsa Instructor and Champion; the kid who was at best a mediocre student, who graduated in the top half of his class at the United States Naval Academy with a degree in Nuclear Engineering / Applied Science and was the Distinguished Graduate of his 2000 Master's Degree program; the kid who was painfully shy and awkward and stuttered, who became the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's preferred choice for briefing Congress and the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations' choice for briefing filled rooms of Flag Officers and Senior Executives on the Chief of Naval Operations' priority program and the United States Navy transformation initiative: FORCEnet.

But for me as a woman and Peter's Life Partner, what truly makes my heart gasp with love and joy is the extraordinary depth of Peter's warmth, love, caring, tenderness, gentleness, and softness. In all our decades together, we have never had a fight - which I attribute largely to Peter because he has never said an unkind thing to me or yelled or even raised his voice. Certainly, as a United States Naval Academy graduate with a superb record of a professional achievement, Peter is a very strong man; I have seen his strong Command Voice wither the most belligerent persons. But I have also witnessed the softness of his spirit calming and elevating the most despondent individual. I saw that particularly when Peter invited me to join him in his church volunteer work with mentally and physically challenged kids. The one example which still brings tears to my eyes was when we were assisting in group Bible study, and one of the little girls had left the group and was crying in the corner of the room. No one else noticed her, but Peter immediately did. Peter gently approached her, and softly asked her: "Cindy, you can you share with me why you are sad?" Cindy tearfully replied, through

chocking sobs “Today is my birthday, and no one remembered”. After putting a comforting hand on Cindy’s shoulder, Peter gathered the entire group together to surround and embrace Cindy with a “Love Bomb” group hug and together sing “Happy Birthday Cindy.” Cindy’s countenance immediately brightened to a laughing smile, as she basked in the recognition and love of her group friends. Peter’s experience with Cindy then made him concerned that other Wellspring children might similarly be forgotten on their birthdays. So he obtained a list of all the Wellspring children’s birthdays, designed a red t-shirt with the title “Wellspring Birthday Herald”, and instituted the practice of heralding each Wellspring child’s birthday by making a dramatic entrance wearing that t-shirt while honking a large horn and singing Happy Birthday to whomever had a birthday, and then presenting a birthday cake and birthday hat to that person to ensure they were fully remembered and celebrated.

What other man would feel so deeply and care so fully and do so much for others?

That is the precious gift of Peter which I hope to most fully show in this chapter about our extraordinary love.

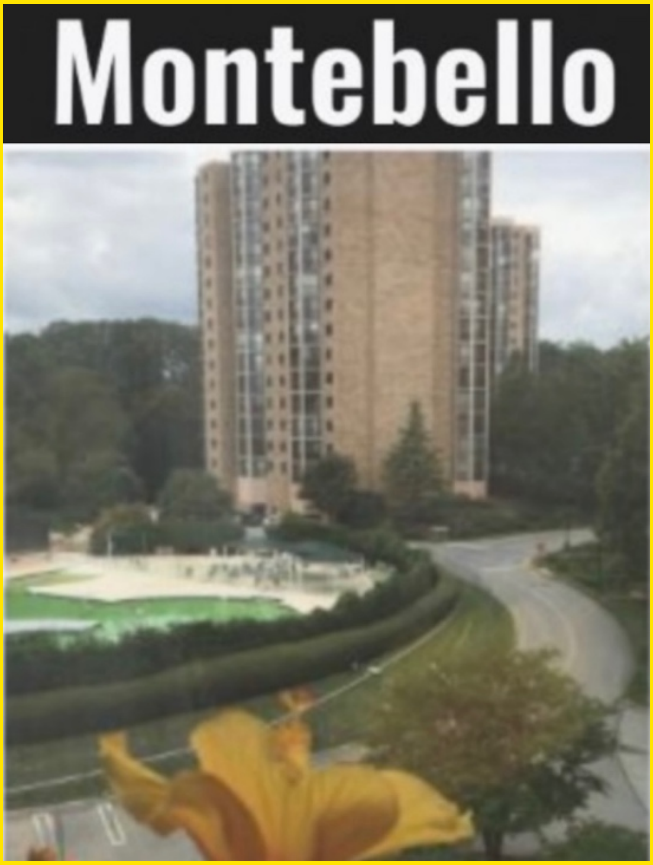
Every day with Peter is a joy, and I thank God each night for bringing us together. Peter has brought me the happiest years of my life.

Our First Meeting

I first met Peter at a very difficult time of my life, because my mother had previously passed away and then my dear father had passed away just months prior. I was disgusted with my dating experiences in trying to meet a nice guy, because all the men I met seemed so shallow and self-centered and angry, and most were players and not interested in a committed long-term relationship. I had almost given up but I prayed to God that I would meet a nice guy. So, I decided to give it one more try by attending a dance in northern Virginia. That night started out terribly, and I particularly couldn't shake one guy who kept following me around. I was ready to leave. And then I saw Peter across the room. Tall, beautiful smile, and definitely the most handsome man there. Peter had not noticed me, and with my being an inveterate introvert it was not in my nature to approach a guy. But there seemed to be something special and kind and safe about Peter, and I found myself so drawn to him that I summoned my courage and approached Peter, asking him to dance. It worked! I know it sounds cliche to say, but that first meeting with Peter was truly magical for me. When I left the dance that night, I felt that it was too much to hope for that Peter might call me. So, when Peter actually called me the next day, I was so very excited. I was also so very pleased to find out that Peter shared my view that the strongest foundation for a successful long-lasting relationship is a love that slowly but steadily grows from friendship, shared interests and goals, and which continues to grow and grow. That's exactly what happened with Peter and me.

Laura Moves into Montebello

After years of such steady growth in our friendship, Peter suggested in 2016 that we could have much more time together if I moved from my geographically remote condominium to Peter's beautiful Montebello condominium complex in Alexandria, Virginia. With all my family and all my National Security colleagues vigorously supporting that idea, this little introvert librarian made her move. After I moved into Peter's Montebello condominium complex in 2016, our relationship took off like a rocket - and it resulted in each of us finding "The Love of Our Life" in the other. Since that. 2016 move-in, we've become wonderfully inseparable.



The Enthralling Legend of "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May"

Peter was wonderfully romantic, surprising me every week with bouquets of roses and adorable love notes to me pasted on the bathroom mirror, and on the kitchen faucet, and even hidden in my shoes. After we took a trip to Cape May, Peter authored a beautiful novella about me entitled **"The Enthralling Legend of "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May"** and had that novella and my picture from Cape May framed and hung in the kitchen. It's so beautiful, that I want to share it with you.

This is the framed novella and photo which Peter mounted in the kitchen:

The Enthralling Legend of "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May"

There is a legend oft told by wide-eyed mariners, shared over flagons of warm rum in the darkened taverns of sea towns. It is of a vision—seen by few, yet never forgotten—of an exquisite diaphanous life-form said to tread the pristine beaches of Cape May, and known only as "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May." Those fortunate few who have beheld this sensual being relate that she possesses a beauty far surpassing any other. Some say she is a mermaid come to land; some that she is the daughter of Poseidon; others that she must herself be a goddess, for such divine beauty could certainly never be possessed by any mortal being. And yet, within this prized sighting, there resides a dreadful terror; for those who have beheld her have become so mesmerized by her beauty as to willingly abandon all earthly possessions, yes even their very lives, for the chance to share just one moment with her. Countless mariners, though hardened by years of sea vicissitudes, have lost their ships upon the shoals of Cape May in an attempt to follow her. Inspired by their tales of wonder and yet counseled by their admonitions, I set out to feast my eyes upon this Maiden of Cape May. Lashing myself to the mast of my vessel, so as to not imperil my crew in this dangerous adventure, I sailed close upon the beaches until… there was I blessed to behold her. I tell you this, my friends: Truly there was never a greater beauty. Overcome by awe and passion, I broke my leather bonds and—despite the plaintive warnings shouted by my shipmates—swam ashore. Laughing as my impetuous action, she raced ahead, leaving only gossamer footprints to guide my pursuit. Though I could only worship her from afar, I felt truly blessed to have descried such wonderous beauty. And so I share the image of this extraordinary maiden, so you too might know that such beauty truly does exist in our earthly plane. Yes, many of you may say this was only a dream. To those I reply: If this be my dream, I pray I shall never wake.

Rapturously Authored by Laura's Dream-Lover, Peter

And here is the beautiful novella which Peter wrote:

The Enthralling Legend of "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May"

There is a legend oft told by wide-eyed mariners, shared over flagons of warm rum in the darkened taverns of sea towns. It is of a vision-seen by few yet never forgotten-of an exquisite diaphanous life-form said to tread the pristine beaches of Cape May and known only as "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May." Those fortunate few who have beheld this sensual being relate that she possesses a beauty far surpassing any other. Some say she is a mermaid come to land; some that she is the daughter of Poseidon; others that she must herself be a goddess, for such divine beauty could certainly never be possessed by any mortal being. And yet, within this prized sighting, there resides a dreadful terror; for those who have beheld her have become so mesmerized by her beauty as to willingly abandon all earthly possessions, yes even their very lives, for the chance to share just one moment with her. Countless mariners, though hardened by years of sea vicissitudes, have lost their ships upon the shoals of Cape May in an attempt to follow her. Inspired by their tales of wonder and yet counseled by their admonitions, I set out to feast my eyes upon this Maiden of Cape May. Lashing myself to the mast of my vessel, so as to not imperil my crew in this dangerous adventure, I sailed close upon the beaches until... there was I blessed to behold her. I tell you this, my friends: Truly there was never a greater beauty. Overcome by awe and passion, I broke my leather bonds and-despite the plaintive warnings shouted by my shipmates-swam ashore. Laughing as my impetuous action, she raced ahead, leaving only gossamer footprints to guide my pursuit. Though I could only worship her from afar, I felt truly blessed to have descried such wonderous beauty. And so, I share the image of this extraordinary maiden, so you too might know that such beauty truly does exist in our earthly plane. Yes, many of you may say this was only a dream. To those I reply: If this be my dream, I pray I shall never wake.

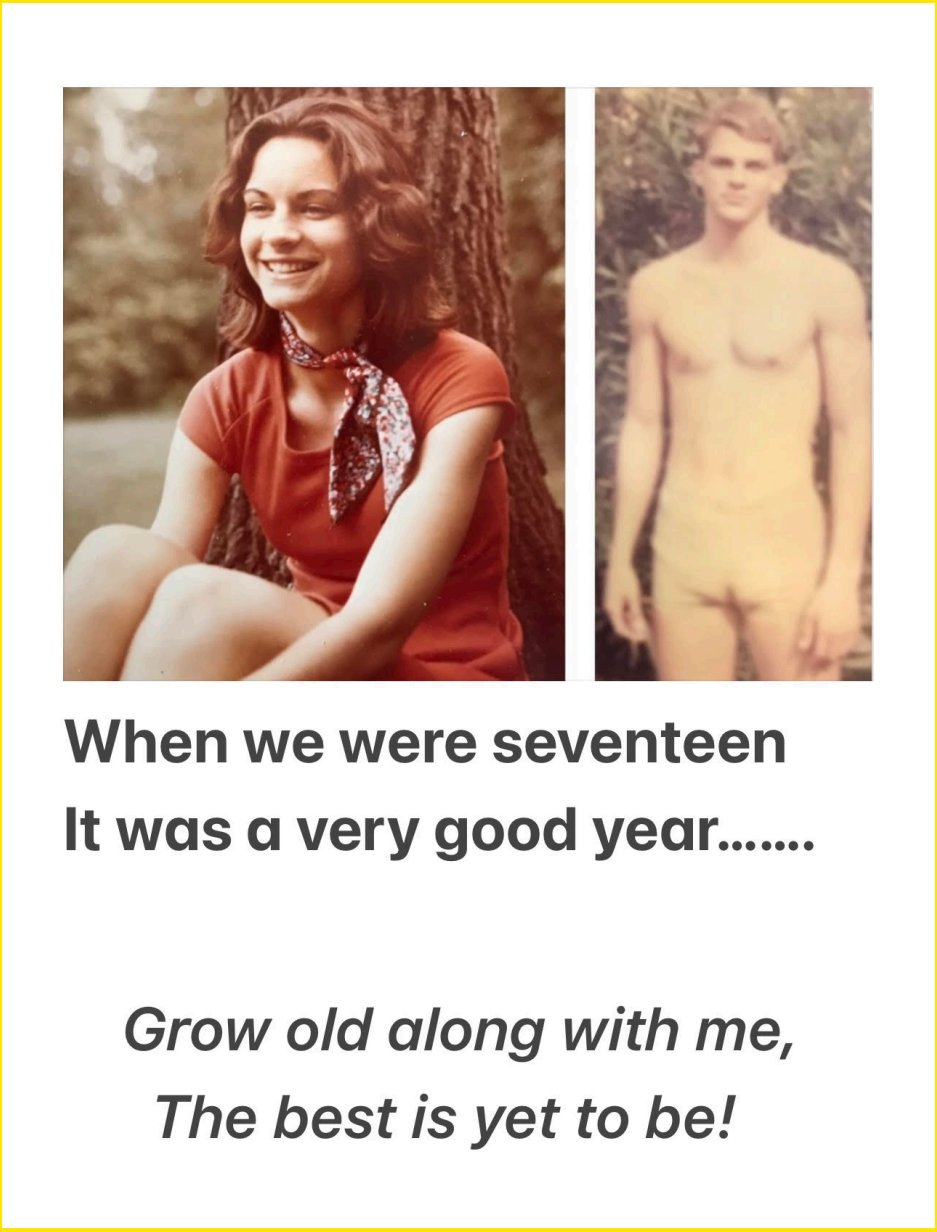
Rapturously Authored by Laura’s Dream Lover, Peter

Pandering To
Plumptious Panda Bears

Peter is so much fun. Soon after we began dating, we started using the pet name "Bear" for each other. So when it was announced that the Panda Bears would be returning to The Washington Zoo, Peter bought us each Bear costumes, and had this sign made with our picture in the Bear costumes and the words "Please Do Not Feed Peter & Laura Bears". Peter explained that this would inform the Panda Bears that we are members of their Ursidae (bear) family, while also requesting of other Zoo visitors that they do not inappropriately try to feed us as Bears. I just love Peter's playful sense of humor.

Come Along And Grow Old With Me

Peter is so beautifully romantic, and wonderfully creative. Those two precious gifts of Peter merged in this framed artwork which Peter designed for me and hung on our wall next to the other framed artwork which he designed for me: "*The Enthralling Legend of "Laura: The Maiden of Cape May"*.



In his use of Robert Browning's poetic words, Peter both invites me into a committed love, and also conveys the promise of great joy which we will share in our future together. And by his having tracked down of each of our photos at age seventeen, then placing them side-by-side, and quoting from Frank Sinatra's song "It Was A Very Good Year", he draws upon the sweet memories of our youth to project the sweetness which we will share together in our old age.

What The Fashionable Easter Bunny Will Wear In 2025 On The "Project Hippity-Hoppity Runway"

Peter always sweetly surprised me, employing his wonderfully whimsical sense of humor. For Easter, Peter posted on his Facebook page: "WHAT THE FASHIONABLE EASTER BUNNY WILL BE WEARING FOR 2025. My Beloved Easter Bunny Laura has fortunately escaped from Mr. McGregor's Cabbage Patch long enough to model these latest "Cottontail Chic" designs from "The Peter Rabbit Collection", which I gifted her for Easter. I am now endeavoring to schedule Laura's debut on the popular television fashion show "Project Hippity-Hoppity Runway". Easter Bunny Laura looks forward to bringing Easter gifts to all the good little children - but this Easter she'll be leaving Gold Bars (24 "Carrot") instead of eggs, because Gold is less expensive!!!

Dancing Like John Travolta

Knowing that I loved socializing with friends, but had difficulty meeting people due to my introvert shyness, my superbly extroverted Peter established and led multiple new, fun social opportunities at our Montebello home. The first drew from Peter's experience during the '70s and early '80s dancing and teaching and giving public demonstrations in Disco Dancing. Peter conceptualized, established, and taught Montebello's first free dance lessons, starting with Disco Dancing via a class which Peter titled "Dance Like John Travolta". The class became an instant success so popular that our "Montebello Voice" newspaper - "The Times of Montebello" - published a full-page pictorial article heralding it.

out & about

Dance like John Travolta with free disco lessons

By Peter "Tall Tex" Blackledge and Laura "Lady Tex" Foy

Disco is stayin' alive at Montebello with upcoming free disco dance lessons and parties. ***The first lesson will take place this Sunday, September 15 from 1 to 2 p.m. in the Community Center lounge. The next disco party will be on October 27.***

Lessons will initially focus on the dances performed by John Travolta in his classic movie Saturday Night Fever, specifically the New York Style (Manhattan) Hustle partner dance and the Brooklyn Shuffle line dance. Eventually, depending on how quickly class participants progress, we could also teach the Latin Hustle and the Sling Hustle, with the possibility of branching out in the future to salsa and bachata.

Our classes will be progressive – each class lesson will build on the previous lesson, beginning with a review, then adding one-to-two new turns/steps, then practicing what we have learned. The September 15 lesson will review the four elements we taught at the September 7 disco party – the basic New York Hustle step, the couple turn, the partner open turn, and the partner closed turn.

We will also start learning the fabulous Brooklyn Shuffle, which you will find is more challenging and complex than most country-Western line dances and the Electric Slide.

Then, four times a year, you will be able to implement what you've learned in these classes when you participate in the free disco parties as we impress the room by performing the Brooklyn Shuffle en masse. It will be epic!

An attendant objective will be to bring Montebello residents the many extraordinary benefits which medical experts tell us dancing brings: happiness, health, and community connectedness.

So if you want to learn how to dance like John Travolta, simply send me an RSVP at longtalltexan@icloud.com (an email RSVP to me each week is the only requirement to participate), put on your boogie shoes, and join your other wonderful Dancing Queens and Disco Dudes as we together take a fabulous ride on the Bodacious Boogie Train To FunkyTown! Ya gotta Get On to Get Down!!!

Photos by Kim Santos

The Montebello Voice 3 September 12, 2019

Teaching John Travolta Moves
To Ages
Four Through Ninety-four

It was so wonderful seeing so many of our Montebello neighbors dancing and laughing together as Peter first taught them "The Brooklyn Shuffle", which was the Line Dance which John Travolta performed in his iconic movie "Saturday Night Fever". And it was particularly heartwarming to see that Peter had established an activity which brought together all ages. Class participant's ages included 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and even 90s. And soon after the class started, it included a very exuberant four-year-old. This happened when four-year-old Abigail was walking through the Montebello Community Center, holding her Grandmother's hand. When Abigail observed Peter's class, she begged her Grandmother to let her join, saying "Grandma, this looks like so much fun; may I please join?" Abigail's Grandmother asked Peter, and Peter felt that wonderful Abigail was much too cute and enthusiastic and hopeful to refuse her. The above photos show the delightful 94-years-young woman who was one of Peter's students in their 90s, and the equally delightful and precocious four-year-old Abigail.

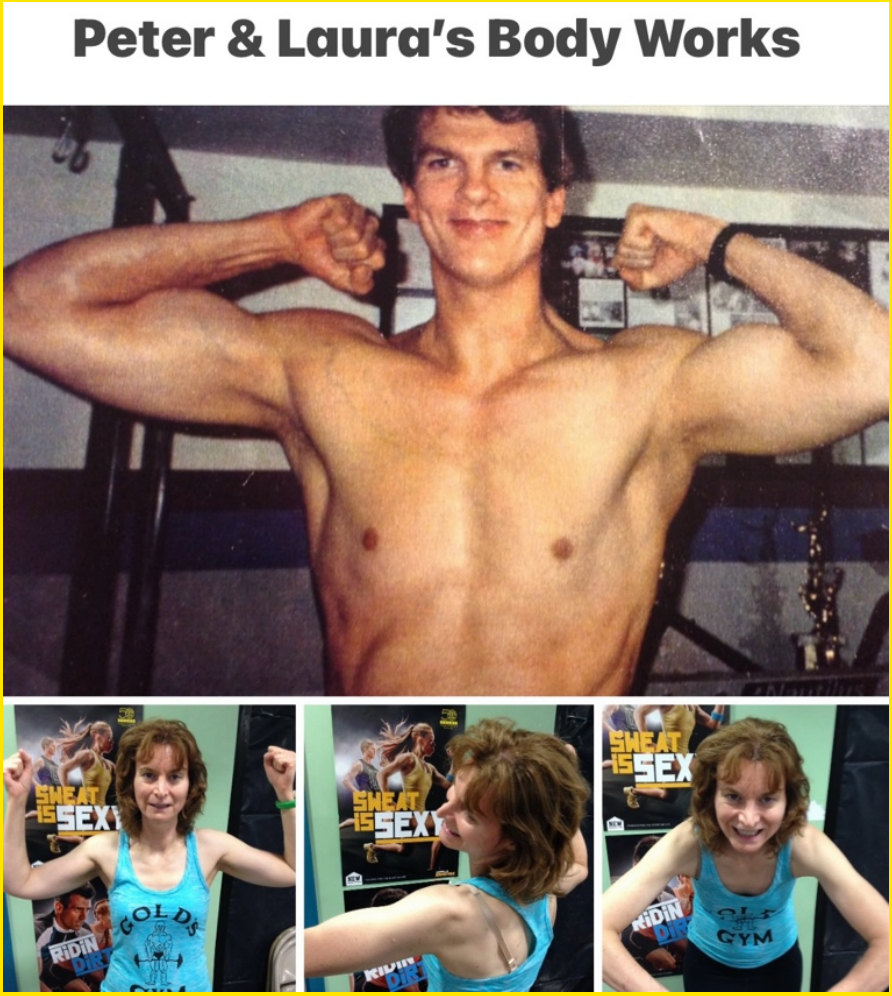
Abigail Becomes An Enduring Dancin' Queen

Abigail absolutely loved to dance. That first dance lesson which Peter gave to Abigail started a wonderful enduring relationship, as Abigail became an enthusiastic student in every one of the subsequent free dance classes which Peter taught at Montebello, including Salsa, Bachata, Merengue, Hustle, Cha-Cha, Country-Western, Hip-Hop, and The Charleston. And during Peter's Fourth of July dance class, Abigail's Grandmother took this darling picture of Peter and Abigail celebrating together. It was also wonderful to see Abigail's grandmother always beaming with pride as she watched Abigail's talented dance progression, and glowing with joy at seeing Abigail's happiness.

Praying For Peter

When Peter became sick with Cancer, Abigail's grandmother would share with us how fervently Abigail would pray for Peter in church.

Pumping Iron



As written earlier, after I moved into Montebello in 2016, Peter and I became inseparable; we could now share nights as well as days. We already shared every interest, and Peter further enhanced our mutual interest in exercise by buying me a lifetime membership to Gold's Gym and also buying me an ERG rowing machine. I started getting up every morning at 4:30am so that I could row on the ERG before commuting to my National Security job, and we went to Gold's Gym together every weekend and every day I was off work. Peter introduced me to more healthful eating, and that combined with the rowing and weightlifting resulted in my losing fourteen pounds - which I've kept off!!!! I was - and am - in the best shape of my life and feel better than ever.

During COVID-19, we set up this home exercise gym in Peter's second bedroom.

That home exercise gym subsequently became a lifesaver for Peter when his Cancer, Chemotherapy, and Androgen Deprivation Therapy made him too Immune Compromised to enter into any indoor gym. For inspiration, Peter hung pictures of his rowing days when he was a United States Naval Academy Plebe and Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman and an Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) 2V8 National Champion.

U.S. Naval Academy Oarsmen Freshmen 1966 & Varsity 1968 Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Championships

USNA CLASS OF 1969
PLEBE/VARSITY HEAVYWEIGHT CREW TEAM

☆

FRESHMAN

Pos.	Name	Age	Ht.	Wt.	Home Town
Bow	Dempsey, Richard M.	18	6-4	185	Arlington, Va.
2	Renfree, Peter R.	19	6-3	190	New Bedford, Conn.
3	Hannemann, James	18	6-5	190	Eagle, Wisc.
4	Gembol, Michael P.	18	6-3	195	Columbus, Neb.
5	Barausky, James E.	19	6-5	200	Pawling, N. Y.
6	Blackledge, Peter D.	18	6-4	181	Houston, Tex.
7	Kolstad, Charles F.	18	6-3	182	Bakersfield, Calif.
Str.	Burbage, Charles T.	20	6-4	200	McLean, Va.
Average			6-4	190	
Cox.	Craft, James P. III	18	5-7	130	Philadelphia, Pa.
Subs.	Simmons, Eric C.	18	5-9	163	Arlington, Va.
	Brixey, Stephen A.	18	6-2	195	McMinnville, Ore.

Coach: Louis W. Gellermann

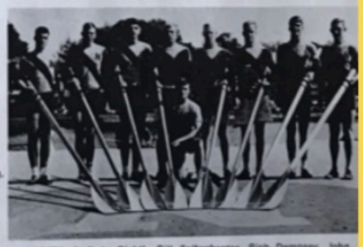
FRESHMAN—(left to right): Robert James, Charles Burbage, Charles Kolstad, Peter Blackledge, James Barausky, Michael Gembol, Richard Dempsey, Eric Simmons, Stephen Brixey, Peter Renfree. Kneeling in front: James Craft.

NAVY

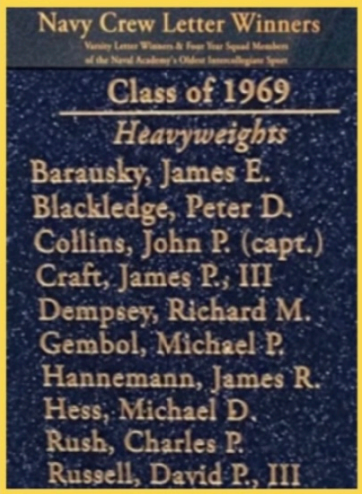
VARSITY

Pos.	Name	Class	Age	Ht.	Wt.	Home Town
Bow	Denson, David	'68	24	6-4	190	Roanoke, Va.
2	Mackenzie, Tom	'70	19	6-4	190	Baltimore, Md.
3	Hannemann, Jim	'69	20	6-5	190	Eagle, Wis.
4	Rowley, Dennis	'68	23	6-4	210	Walnut Creek, Cal.
5	Miller, Stuart	'70	19	6-4	205	Huron, Ohio
6	Blackledge, Peter	'69	20	6-4	190	Houston, Tex.
7	Dempsey, Rich.	'69	20	6-4	190	San Antonio, Tex.
Str.	Saltenberger, Wm.	'70	20	6-2	190	Medford Lakes, N.J.
Average				6-4	192	
Cox.	Prince, Robert	'70	20	5-4	120	Ithaca, N.Y.
Subs.	Hess, Mike	'69	20	6-3	190	Newton, Mass.
	Elliott, Charles	'70	21	6-4	195	Kansas City, Mo.

Coach: Louis W. Gellermann Manager: D. P. Russell

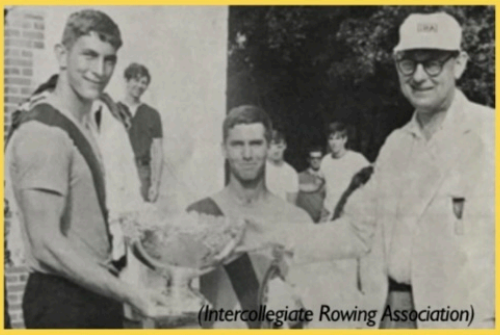


VARSITY—(Left to Right): Bill Saltenberger, Rich Dempsey, John Collins, Stu Miller, Mike Malone, Mike Hess, Pete Blackledge, Jim Schwenk, (Kneeling): Bob Prince.



(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)

U. S. Naval Academy Oarsmen Win Intercollegiate Rowing Association 1967 2V8 National Championship


(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)

(Sports Illustrated)

(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)

Spoils enroute to Crabtown lockers.

(Intercollegiate Rowing Association)

Navy coxswain heads for watery ceremonial.

USNA Navy Crew Honor: On 17 June 1967, in front of 15,000 crew fans, the 1967 USNA 2V8 dramatically & decisively won its IRA Regatta of 14 top rowing colleges— beating nearest competitor Penn by a full two lengths, and having even more open water on Wisconsin, Cornell, Washington, Syracuse, California, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Princeton, UCLA, Brown, Northeastern, and Stanford—bringing the Kennedy Challenge Trophy back to USNA for the fifth time in history. (Intercollegiate Rowing Association and Syracuse Herald-American)

(Peter Douglas Blackledge)

Penn's sweep of Regatta spoiled by Navy

(The New York Times, Syracuse Herald-American)

(Peter Douglas Blackledge)

Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Championships, 1969

Peter said that every time the extreme pain and crushing fatigue of his Cancer, Chemotherapy, and Androgen Deprivation Therapy made him want to give up, he would look up at those pictures and recall the extreme pain and crushing fatigue which he had to fight through for every 2000 meter race and practice: at the 500 meter mark, the 1000 meter mark, and the 1500 meter mark of each of his hundreds of practices and races - and memories of his successfully overcoming each of those repeated challenges of extreme fatigue and pain would now help Peter push through the extreme pain and crushing fatigue of his Cancer, Chemotherapy, and Androgen Deprivation Therapy. Peter said that his having learned how to push aside and ignore extreme pain and crushing fatigue in his four years of rowing Plebe and Varsity Heavyweight Crew for the United States Naval Academy was now keeping him going and saving his life.

Peter had previously found an artist to sculpt a neon sign that read “Peter’s Pump Works”, but with our now working out together Peter sweetly had our gym pictures mounted on canvas under

the title “Peter & Laura’s Body Works”, and he hung that mounted canvas in our now shared home exercise room.

To help me better deal with my very high-stress National Security job, Peter introduced me to Transcendental Meditation, and we started meditating together - which also is a fabulous bonding experience - and I felt my work stress just melt away. And each night, we prayed together - an even greater bonding experience - and we both had never felt closer to each other and to God.

In Utero
Country-Western Line Dancing

Four-year-old Abigail had maintained her "Ripley's Believe It Or Not" record of "Youngest Student in Peter's Dance Classes" until a very pregnant Heather showed up for Peter's Country-Western Line Dance class. Heather advised that she was only two weeks away from delivery, and she wanted to start exposing her daughter-to-be Oriana to the same love of dancing that Heather enjoyed while growing up. Peter and I were very impressed that Heather - while dancing for two - was able to expertly complete Peter's "Boot Scootin' Boogie" class. A few weeks later, Heather and her adorable new baby Oriana showed up ready to dance, and beautifully completed Peter's class in "Cotton Eye Joe."
Oriana's early exposure to dancing has apparently had the desired positive effect, as this picture shows Oriana has already gown up to have a dancer's cool, suave style.

Salsa Fever

Just as Disco Dancing - principally Manhattan, Latin, and Sling Hustle - had dominated the DMV (District Of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia) dance club scene in the 1970s and early 1980s, Salsa Dancing had dominated the DMV dance club scene throughout the during the 1990s through early 2000s. "The Salsa Room" was the premier DMV dance club for all the best Salsa dancers, and Peter loved dancing Salsa there every weekend for more than twenty years. Peter had even been persuaded by a local dance studio to perform a Salsa demonstration for their students. The dance studio videoed Peter's Salsa demonstration, and posted it on YouTube; it can be viewed at the following link:

https://youtu.be/mAwErTGM38I

Although Salsa was one of the primary dances which Peter taught in his free lessons to our Montebello neighbors, Peter believed in introducing his dance students to a full palate of dances which he taught, to facilitate his students' decisions on which dances they preferred. Accordingly, Peter provided a broad spectrum of free dances classes to our Montebello neighbors, including not only Salsa but also Merengue, Cha-Cha, Texas Two-Step, Country-Western Line Dancing, and even Hip Hop and The Charleston. Peter taught his final set of dance lessons at Dusk in Montebello's beautiful outdoors environment surrounded by a canopy of trees; Peter titled that class "Dancing At Dusk." As is detailed in the attached Montebello bulletin:

Free Dance Lessons
& Social Dancing
- "Dancing At Dusk" -
Join your Montebello neighbors
in these free & fun outdoor
Dance Lessons & Socials
- Salsa, Bachata, Merengue, &
Country Western Line Dancing -
Congratulations Graduates!!!
Dancing At Dusk
CLASS OF 2022
Montebello's Historic First Outdoor Dance Social

Peter received a comprehensive email from the President of Montebello's Board of Directors, complementing Peter on the extraordinary success and endurance of the many new and free and very popular activities which Peter had created for Montebello residents and to which he has so freely given so much of his time.

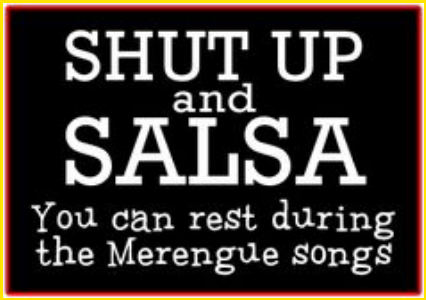
"During the five months of its inaugural 2022 season, "Dancing At Dusk" brought together 143 of Montebello's neighbors, with up to 34 participants in each of the classes, thereby creating a unique Community of Camaraderie, Movement, And Joy. Neighbors who had never met, most of whom had never danced, suddenly found themselves dancing and laughing together."

"Afternoon Delight"
Latin Dance Socials
Sharing the Passion of Dance
Merengue
When you get the choice to "Sit It Out" or "Dance," we hope you "Dance"

Life Is A Dance

Scatter Joy
Share Your Smile
Spread A Contagion Of Kindness
Celebrate Enthusiasm
Love Without Reserve
Laugh Too Loud
Dance With Your Heart
Be A Lighthouse
Shine

During the five months of its inaugural 2022 season, "Dancing At Dusk" brought together 143 of Montebello's neighbors, with up to 34 participants in each of the classes, thereby creating a unique Community Of Camaraderie, Movement, And Joy. Neighbors who had never met, most of whom had never danced, suddenly found themselves dancing and laughing together.



Spreading “Dance Feaver”

I am so glad that Peter and my sister Alison had immediate chemistry since I first introduced them, and their mutual adoration has continued to grow. It’s always so much fun to see Peter and Alison together, because - as can be seen in these pictures - they are like two laughing children at play, and their shared time together is a play date. Peter’s passion for dancing is contagious, and provided another endeavor for all three of us to jubilantly share - as Alison and I both contracted a rapturous case of “Dance Fever” from Peter.

From Salsa Dance Fanatic
To “Peter Bachata-Seed”

In the early 2000s, a new very popular dance emerged on the DMV dance scene: BACHATA. It became a virtual obsession at “The Salsa Room” and other dance clubs, and took over the Latin airwaves. Whereas Salsa was a very fast and exciting dance with primarily Cuban influences, Bachata was a more sensual and romantic dance originating from the Dominican Republic, and which had its own exceptionally beautiful music. Peter was hooked; he bought me “Bachata: Live, Love Dance” dancers’ tights, and switched the primary focus of his dance classes and his own dancing to Bachata.

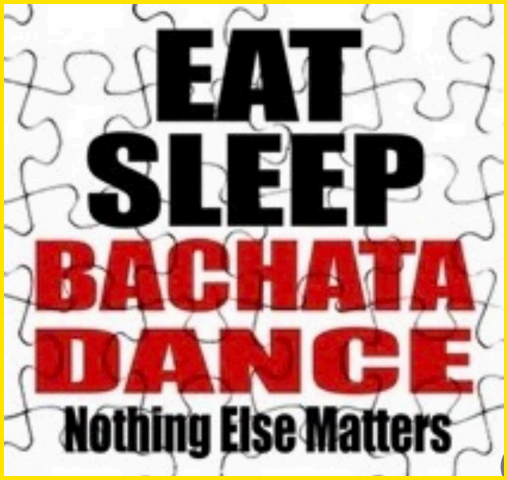
Peter related the story of a food delivery man who heard Peter playing Bachata music when Peter opened his door to receive his grocery delivery. In his very heavy Latin accent, the man asked Peter with some incredulity "You like Bachata?" When Peter answered "Yes", the short food deliveryman's bent and burdened posture seemed to grow immediately taller and straighter and stronger, as he proudly announced to Peter: "I am Dominican!!!" Peter felt it was wonderful that Bachata's new popularity had brought this beleaguered food delivery man such immense personal pride.

Peter's Bachata classes became so popular that word about them got out past Montebello's confines, and Peter was asked by the Manager of "Gold's Gym" (which had changed its name to "Results Fitness") to teach his "Bachata Motion" class at their very large and popular facility. Peter's "Bachata Motion" class was a fantastic success at "Results Fitness", and students told us they were driving very long distances just to take Peter's classes.

RESULTS FITNESS presents:
"Bachata Motion"
• Bachata, Merengue, and Salsa Latin Dance Class and Dance Social •
• Every Saturday afternoon at RESULTS FITNESS •
• 3-4pm: "Bachata Motion" Dance Lesson 4-5pm: "Bachata Motion" Dance Social •
• Free to RESULTS FITNESS members – only $10 for non-members •
• Five instructors! Huge wooden dance floor! 54,000 sq ft fitness facilities! Free parking! •
Advanced registration required: for registration and information contact
Peter Blackledge at LongTallTexan@icloud.com
RESULTS FITNESS is privileged to bring you these five highly-experienced dance instructors:
Peter & Cathy
Dr. Bob & Katy
Peter & Laura
Peter & Student
- Initial classes and socials focus on Bachata with future integration of Merengue & Salsa
- Five experienced instructors per class will provide participants extraordinary individual attention and allow students to rapidly progress from Bachata basics to Advanced Turn Combinations, Syncopated Steps, Locks, Spins, Cuddles, Hand Tosses, Back Passes, Flicks, Fakes, Drapes, Shines, Sweeps, and Head Rolls.
Merengue
I ♥ BACHATA
El Espiritu de la Salsa
"Bachata is today's Tango, beautifully imbued with enhanced Artistry, Attitude and Heat. When you catch 'Bachata Fever', you won't want the cure."
— Peter Blackledge, Bachata-Merengue-Salsa Latin Dance Instructor
When given the choice to "Sit It Out" or "Dance," we hope you "Dance"
RESULTS FITNESS
A Better Way of Life
7770 Richmond Hwy
Alexandria, VA 22306
703-360-1400

I'M SINGLE
and you have to dance
amazing bachata
to change that

THIS COULD BE US
BUT YOU DON'T
DANCE BACHATA


EAT
SLEEP
BACHATA
DANCE
Nothing Else Matters

I HAVE
O.B.D.
OBSESSIVE
BACHATA
DISORDER

Texas Two Step

For his Texas Two Step dance parties, Peter put up Wild West Saloon décor and put up Western signs.

Country-Western Line Dancing

For his “Boot Scootin’ Boogie” Country-Western Line Dance Party, Peter gave miniature boots to all his students.

And added Old West decor to get his students into the Country-Western mood.

For his **“Cotton Eye Joe” Country-Western Line Dance Class**, Peter added decor which simulated the games one might find at a Country Western Fair.

And included fun inflatable barnyard animals to complete the ambiance.

And it was wonderful to see the broad age spectrum of dance students, as exampled in this picture ranging from 12 to 95.

Roaring 20s
Great Gatsby Dance Party

For his “Roaring 20s Great Gatsby” Dance Party, Peter taught everyone how to do “The Charleston”, and he brought Goldfish crackers for everyone to eat - in remembrance of the 1920’s fad of eating live goldfish.

We Love Jim Rooney

When retired U.S. Coast Guard Captain Jim Rooney - who was one of Peter's most avid but also most aged supporters - became very ill, Peter went online and found a personalized sign to express love and support for Jim. Peter gathered some of his students to convey support for that wonderful man. Jim was very touched by the remembrance and sentiment.

Montebello Walkers Become Sole Mates

I was very happy to have gained so many wonderful friends, plus learned many fun dances, from Peter's dance classes. But Peter recognized that most of our Montebello neighbors don't dance, they walk. So, Peter established Montebello's first ever walking group: "Montebello Walkers." Peter's idea was perfect, because Montebello is a gated and guarded community - so our walks would be very safe from crime and speeding automobiles - and Montebello is beautifully landscaped and is inhabited with many interesting creatures, with Butterfly Gardens, deer, fox, and gorgeous canopied trees, woodlands, and pocket forests which contain diverse wildlife. "The Times Of Montebello" attached article reflects the great interest of Montebello residents in "Montebello Walkers".

Montebello Walkers' Take Off On an Inaugural Walk

by Peter Blackledge, Activities Committee

Montebello's Activities Committee makes history by establishing the first outdoor walking activity, the "Montebello Walkers" (MBW). It allows Montebello residents to improve their health while getting to know their neighbors and enjoying our beautifully landscaped grounds. This activity was conceptualized, coordinated, and implemented by Activities Committee members Peter Blackledge and Laura Foy, who prepare and host each walking event.

Their Inaugural Walk occurred on Nov. 12 and was dedicated to honoring Montebello's many Military Veterans. Over 40 residents, including five Veterans, participated. A particularly popular element of MBW is awarding each participant an Olympic-style "Walking" medal, as shown here.

"MBW Docents" will expand the walking portion to add an intellectual element, combining mental, physical, and social benefits. Docents will bring residents and outside experts to share their knowledge via Aristotelian-like lectures during MBW walks.

The Grounds Committee (GC) Chair Paul Zeisset enthusiastically wrote of the idea, "Peter, congratulations on launching your new activity…several members of the GC are interested in supporting your activity, particularly if walkers appear interested in descriptions of some of the things they may see in the developed landscape and on the trails. When appropriate, we could provide "walking docents" when your audience is interested in the butterfly gardens, the developed area behind Building 2, or, in the woodlands, the new pocket forest or springtime wildflowers." Other Montebello Committees and Clubs, as well as several outside organizations, have expressed interest in participating.

Montebello residents interested in participating in these free activity walks occurring every Saturday at 3 p.m., weather permitting, may email Peter Blackledge at LongTallTexan@icloud.com.

Peter and I were particularly pleased that our new “Montebello Walkers” group included several veterans, as shown in the below photo to the right of the group picture from the newspaper article on “Montebello Walkers” inaugural walk.

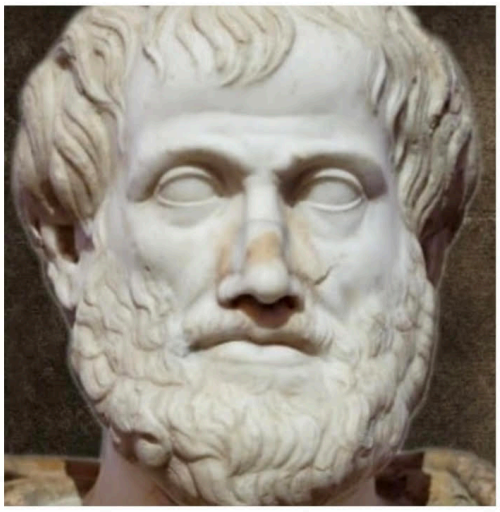
A particularly creative touch which Peter added were the beautiful Olympic-style Walking Medals which Peter found online. I must admit that I didn’t fully appreciate the importance and impact of those medals until I witnessed Peter presenting them to the individual “Montebello Walkers” and I saw that some of the physically challenged “Montebello Walkers” - who participated in walking despite the challenge of their Walkers and Wheelchairs - were so tearfully and emotionally thankful to receive these medals. I found out from talking with one of these physically challenged “Montebello Walkers” that they had spent all their lives on the sidelines, unable to participate in sports or other activities, and their coming out to participate in “Montebello Walkers” was a major and difficult step for them - and to have then been recognized for their effort, and receiving this first medal in their lives, was an emotional gift which they would always cherish. Once again, Peter had brought joy into other people’s lives.

To further make “Montebello Walkers” feel “special”, Peter designed and produced these unique nametags.

And for those intrepid “Montebello Walkers” who were hardy and brave enough to join Peter and me when the temperature was freezing, Peter designed and produced these additional unique nametags.

Would you be willing to share your knowledge with your Montebello neighbors by being a "Montebello Walking Docent"? If so, please email Montebello Activities Committee member Peter Blackledge at:
LongTallTexan@icloud.com

Each "Montebello Walking Docent" will receive this "Montebello Walking Docent Aristotle Award", a 5"x7" specially designed custom canvas art print mounted on a wood frame.



Montebello Walking Docent

Aristotle Award

Walking and the pursuit of knowledge are two of life's glories. To share both with our Montebello neighbors is truly sublime.

Sponsored by Montebello Activities Committee

To add a fun intellectual element to "Montebello Walkers", Peter very creatively established Montebello's first "Montebello Walking Docents." The purpose of "Montebello Walking Docents" was for Montebello residents to share with their fellow residents their unique knowledge, all while walking - in the style of Aristotle. Peter additionally designed and produced the above "Montebello Walking Docent Aristotle Award" - a 5"x7" specially designed custom canvas art print mounted on a wood frame.

The first “Montebello Walking Docent” whom Peter found was a media consultant who had just returned to the United States after spending three years in war-torn Ukraine; he was able to provide interesting insights into the Russia-Ukraine War.

The second “Montebello Walking Docent” was a horticultural expert and the past President of Montebello’s Ground’s Committee, who gave a fascinating tour and provided interesting information and insights regarding Montebello’s Butterfly Garden and its pollinator inhabitants, Montebello’s pocket forests, and the history of Montebello’s Japanese tree purchases.

Photo by Elton Ashford

On May 6, 21 members of Montebello Walkers enjoyed a fascinating and fun hour-long tour of Montebello's beautiful landscaping and many historical landmarks, led by Grounds Committee member Paul Zeisset. The tour included information regarding our new sidewalks, the flowers in bloom, and pollinators in our three Butterfly Gardens, history of the property, wildlife, and features of woods. If you would enjoy information or participation regarding future tours, please email Montebello Walkers Chair Peter Blackledge at LongTailTexan@icloud.com.

Following that highly successful “Montebello Walking Docent” tour, Peter was able to find and schedule many other interesting Montebello neighbors with unique topics. One was the official docent for both the Pentagon and New York City Twin Towers regarding the 9–11 Terrorist Attacks on those two locations.

Peter then started to reach outside Montebello’s walls to find and schedule other “Montebello Walking Docents”, and he was immediately able to find and schedule an Architecture Docent from Chicago and also the Director of Communications for the United States Naval Academy.

“Montebello Walking Docents”
Is Proud To Present Two Special Talks By
Official 9-11 Docent
Bruce Powers
The New York Times
U.S. ATTACKED
HIJACKED JETS DESTROY TWIN TOWERS AND HIT PENTAGON IN DAY OF TERROR
A CREEPING HORROR
Buildings Burn and Fall as Onlookers Search for Elusive Safety
President Vows to Exact Punishment for ‘Evil’
Talk # 1: “The Pentagon”, Saturday, January 14, With “Montebello Walkers”, Starting At 3pm in front of Building Four
Talk # 2: “The NYC Twin Towers”, Saturday, January 21, With “Montebello Walkers”, Starting At 3pm in front of Building Four
For RSVP & information, email Montebello Activities Committee Member Peter Blackledge at LongTallTexan@icloud.com

Supporting Our Military Veterans

MMMVFS Group was founded by, and is self-funded by, four Montebello U.S. Military Veterans (one U.S. Army, two U.S. Navy, and one U.S. Air Force, who together have more than a century of combined Military service), and a current U.S. DOD-related Agency Civilian who is the daughter of decorated WWII Veteran Jack "Pouch" Foy:

MMMVFS Group Founders:
🇺🇸 Chair & Overall / Lead Coordinator: Peter Blackledge
🇺🇸 Co-Chair & U.S. Army Coordinator: Cerie Kimball (who is also the Co-Managing Editor of "The Times Of Montebello")
🇺🇸 Co-Chair & U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, & U.S. Merchant Marine Coordinator: Rolf Dietrich (who is also a Member of the Montebello Board Of Directors)
🇺🇸 Co-Chair & U.S. Air Force & U.S. Space Command Coordinator: Bruce Nichols (a 22 year USAF Combat Pilot)
🇺🇸 Vice-Chair & Coordinator for Military / Veteran Family Members (particularly Widows & Widowers), Civilians / Contractors for DOD or Intelligence Agencies, and Supporters (including Friends and Guests): Laura Foy

One of the many successful Montebello activities which Peter established was particularly special and appreciated, because it was not only to help me meet new friends but also to support Peter's fellow Military Veterans. Our Montebello condominium has more than one thousand residents, many of whom are Military Veterans. Peter was surprised and saddened there had never been a Montebello organization which supported our Military Veterans: Peter decided to fix that. He wrote a detailed planning document, coordinated it with other Montebello Military Veterans, gained unanimous approval from the Montebello Activities Committee, and immediately started implementation. Peter gave the organization a very inclusive name, in order to be supportive of broad range of personnel: "Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, and Supporters (MMMVFS)". MMMVFS was headed and chaired by Peter as the Senior Military Veteran, with Peter's Co-Chairs being a United States Army Lieutenant Colonel, a United States Navy Commander, and a United States Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, and with my being a Vice Chair due to my position as a United States Security official. Peter designed a MMMVFS logo, designed and purchased MMMVFS ball caps,

created a MMMVFS website,

honored distinguished military veterans whom we have lost, and implemented a schedule of military events, starting with the critically important but all-too-often overlooked National Vietnam War Veterans Day.

Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, & Supporters Group is pleased to sponsor & host Montebello's Historic First Celebration Of National Vietnam War Veterans Day

SUPPORT OUR TROOPS
Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, & Supporters
THANK YOU VIETNAM VETERANS
At each going down of the sun and in each morning We will remember Robert HE WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN
Robert Feickert

Our celebration will additionally honor our recently deceased Montebello Resident and Vietnam Veteran Robert Feickert, the beloved Life Companion of Co-Managing Editor of *The Times Of Montebello* Cerie Kimball.

For RSVP, info, & weather cancellations email MMMVFS Group Chair Peter Blackledge at LongTallTexan@icloud.com

When Peter addressed the group of fellow Vietnam War Era Veterans, he shared his experience of being spat on for wearing his uniform during the Vietnam War era. Peter was stunned by the intense visceral response of other officers who had served during that period, as it became clear that almost every one of the participants in Peter's Vietnam War memorial that day had that same experience. One of the participants was a very distinguished - but now aged and using a walking cane - retired United States Air Force Colonel, who was the Vice President of Montebello's Board of Directors. As Peter shared his experience of being spat upon, that retired United States Air Force Colonel sorrowfully lowered his head. He then very audibly whispered, while visibly trembling, "Yes, that happened to me too".

The two videos of that very moving memorial are posted on Facebook and YouTube, and have evoked deep emotions from fellow Vietnam War Era Veterans.

Peter Blackledge
Admin Mar 29, 2023 ·
This is one of two videos of Montebello's 29March2023 historic first commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of National Vietnam War Veterans Day.
together for this and we're going to have our pictures in
17
10 comments Seen by 20
Like
Comment
Copy
Share
Robert Works
A very moving ceremony. Thank you for sending it to me. The Vietnam e... See more

The second MMMVFS event was Memorial Day, again evoking very strong emotions and memories - and deep gratitude for remembering and honoring our fallen military veterans.

Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, & Supporters (MMMVFS) Group

Memorial Day Gathering

To Honor Our Fallen

Monday, 29May2023, 4pm to 5pm

Moved To ADA-Accessible Tennis Court #1

SUPPORT OUR TROOPS
Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, & Supporters
They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the su
and in the morning
We will remember them.
On this Memorial Day,
Remember the Fallen,
Honor their Service and Sacrifice
and Rejoice in your Freedom.

🇺🇸 Meet-Greet-Remember-Honor-Share

🇺🇸 MMMVFS Group Picture

🇺🇸 Each participant receives **Lest We Forget** Red & Black Metal Poppy Lapel Pin

🇺🇸 For RSVP, Info, Weather Cancellations:I Email MMMVFS Chair PeterBlackledge LongTallTexan@icloud.com

Our flag does not fly because the wind moves it;

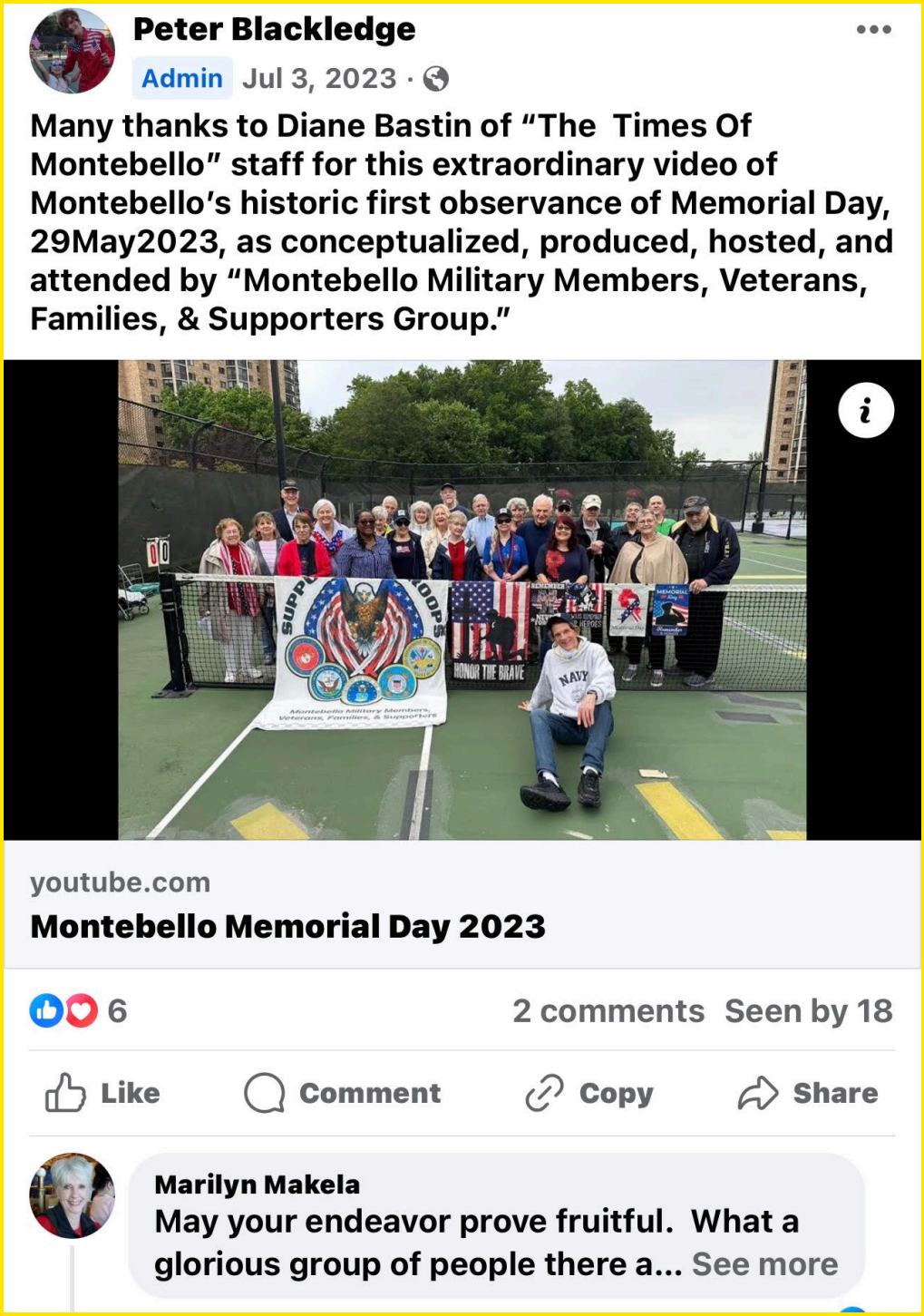
It flies with the last breath of each soldier who died protecting it.

Join your military colleagues in honoring our fallen comrades

who gave the last full measure of devotion in support of country.

Email MMMVFS Group Chair Peter Blackledge
LongTallTexan@icloud.com

That ceremony was videoed by staff from “The Times Of Montebello” newspaper, with that video posted to YouTube. That video was also particularly moving because “The Times Of Montebello” newspaper staff interviewed each of the event’s participants about their individual military experience. That video was posted to YouTube for posterity.


Peter Blackledge
Admin Jul 3, 2023 ·
Many thanks to Diane Bastin of “The Times Of Montebello” staff for this extraordinary video of Montebello’s historic first observance of Memorial Day, 29May2023, as conceptualized, produced, hosted, and attended by “Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, & Supporters Group.”
HONOR THE BRAVE
NAVY
youtube.com
Montebello Memorial Day 2023
6
2 comments Seen by 18
Like
Comment
Copy
Share
Marilyn Makela
May your endeavor prove fruitful. What a glorious group of people there a... See more

Two MMMVFS ceremonies were held at the historic Hubbard Hall of the United States Naval Academy in 2019 and 2024. The 2024 ceremony was particularly touching because at that time Peter had contracted Stage Four Advanced Metastatic Prostate Cancer, Lymph Node Cancer, and Bone Cancer, and Peter had been told by his Oncologist that Peter was dying from those incurable and fatal Cancers. But Peter was determined to honor the Fallen and Deceased Military Veterans. Fulfilling the 150-year tradition of honor at the United States Naval Academy, Peter personally donated a Memorial Navy Crew Racing Shell to the United States Naval Academy, and had arranged with the Director of Rowing at the United States Naval Academy to have the names of deceased Montebello Military Veterans permanently inscribed on the interior of that Memorial Navy Crew Racing Shell. I had begged Peter not to host the ceremony because he was too weak. But Peter was determined to personally honor his fellow military veterans and Montebello by hosting that event. The sight of Peter slumped over in his wheelchair, but ringing that Navy bell one strike for each Fallen and Deceased Veteran as that Veteran's name was called out - in the tradition of honor established for the 9-11 deceased - brought tears to my eyes. But I was so very proud of Peter that day, for his dedication and compassion. Peter became, and is, my courageous hero.

Military Affairs Corner

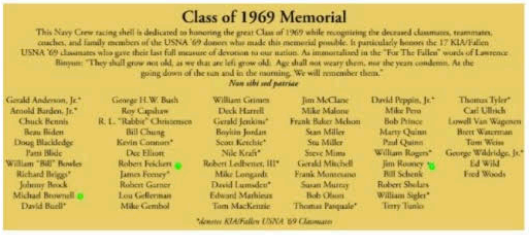
by Cerie Kimball, Staff writer, The Times

Montebello's Deceased Veterans Honored

On Aug. 30, Peter Blackledge, chair of the Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, and Supporters Group, hosted a tribute at the U.S. Naval Academy's (USNA) Hubbard Hall in Annapolis for fallen and deceased military veterans.

This event was a poignant tribute to three deceased Montebello veterans: ***Colonel Michael Brownell, U.S. Army (retired); Captain Jim Rooney, U.S. Coast Guard (retired); and Sergeant First Class Robert Feickert, U.S. Army (retired).*** These three veterans made significant personal sacrifices and represented all of Montebello's deceased veterans. This gesture solemnly acknowledged their service and sacrifice, evoking deep gratitude and respect.

Following the 150-year tradition of Peter's Alma Mater (USNA), he joined his life partner Laura Foy in donating the Memorial Shell to USNA. This shell, a symbol of honor and remembrance, is used in rowing competitions. It was donated to honor fallen/deceased military veterans and other beloved deceased whose names Peter arranged to be permanently inscribed on the interior of the Racing Shell. The three deceased Montebello veterans are included on that brass template, as shown below. The lettering is too small, so they are marked with a green dot.



Class of 1969 Memorial

This Navy Crew racing shell is dedicated to honoring the great Class of 1969 while recognizing the deceased classmates, teammates, coaches, and family members of the USNA '69 donors who made this memorial possible. It particularly honors the 17 KIA/Fallen USNA '69 classmates who gave their last full measure of devotion to our nation. As immortalized in the "For The Fallen" words of Lawrence Binyon: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them."

Non sibi sed patriae

Gerald Anderson, Jr.*	George H.W. Bush	William Grimes	Jim McClane	David Peppin, Jr.*	Thomas Tyler*
Arnold Burden, Jr.*	Roy Capshaw	Dick Harrell	Mike Malone	Mike Pess	Carl Ulrich
Chuck Bennis	R. L. "Rabbit" Christensen	Gerald Jenkins*	Frank Baker Melson	Bob Prince	Lowell Van Wagenen
Beau Biden	Bill Chong	Boykin Jordan	Sean Miller	Marty Quinn	Brett Waterman
Doug Blackledge	Kevin Connors*	Scott Ketchie*	Stu Miller	Paul Quinn	Tom Weiss
Patti Blide	Dee Elliott	Nile Kraft*	Steve Mims	William Rogers*	George Wildridge, Jr.*
William "Bill" Bowles	Robert Feickert	Robert Ledbetter, III*	Gerald Mitchell	Jim Rooney	Ed Wild
Richard Briggs*	James Feeney*	Mike Longards	Frank Montesano	Bill Schenk	Fred Woods
Johnny Brock	Robert Garner	David Lumsden*	Susan Murray	Robert Shokes	
Michael Brownell	Lou Gefferman	Edward Mathieux	Bob Olsen	William Sigler*	
David Buell*	Mike Gembol	Tom MacKenzie	Thomas Pasquale*	Terry Tunies	

*denotes KIA/Fallen USNA '69 Classmates

For the formal christening ceremony, Peter called out their names as their representatives poured ceremonial water from gold christening cups over the bow of the Memorial. Peter struck the vintage U.S. Navy brass bell once after each name. In the photo below, Charlie McClelland, a Montebello resident, christened the Memorial in the names of our three deceased veterans.

More than 150 people, including Peter's USNA classmates, friends, family members, and Montebello residents, traveled all over the U.S. and overseas to participate. Montebello residents included Charlie McClelland and Bonnie Smith, Armando and Elaine Araujo, Janell Blue (widow of Colonel Brownell), and Carolyn Strano. Their presence and support underscored the unity and shared respect within our military community, making everyone feel connected and part of a larger family.

Photos by Carolyn Strano

Peter Blackledge is ready to call out deceased veterans' names.

A videographer recorded the commemoration in the following six videos, available for open viewing on YouTube:
https://youtu.be/ED1ldZKe20A?si=fxrkRaoOqhLhe8ta
https://youtu.be/17xcZuce8S0?si=Lgs5_-K9VBKhaAz0
https://youtu.be/MFfUjslAs6E?si=JkIB0Za0e3BANsjr
https://youtu.be/j0vHKGiFViI?si=lKo-gpq-2kgnouR-
https://youtu.be/YFn2VhlctvY?si=g_Q8LdyV8DH_4V7L
https://youtu.be/r1FLlSi-wrQ?si=yw2_JqrHwPUACR7s

Thanks to Peter for planning and hosting this special event, especially for arranging to include Montebello's deceased veterans in this memorial dedication. Given his current health situation, Peter's extraordinary effort and commitment to making this happen truly inspires and deserves our appreciation.

Fort Belvoir's Annual Retiree Appreciation Day

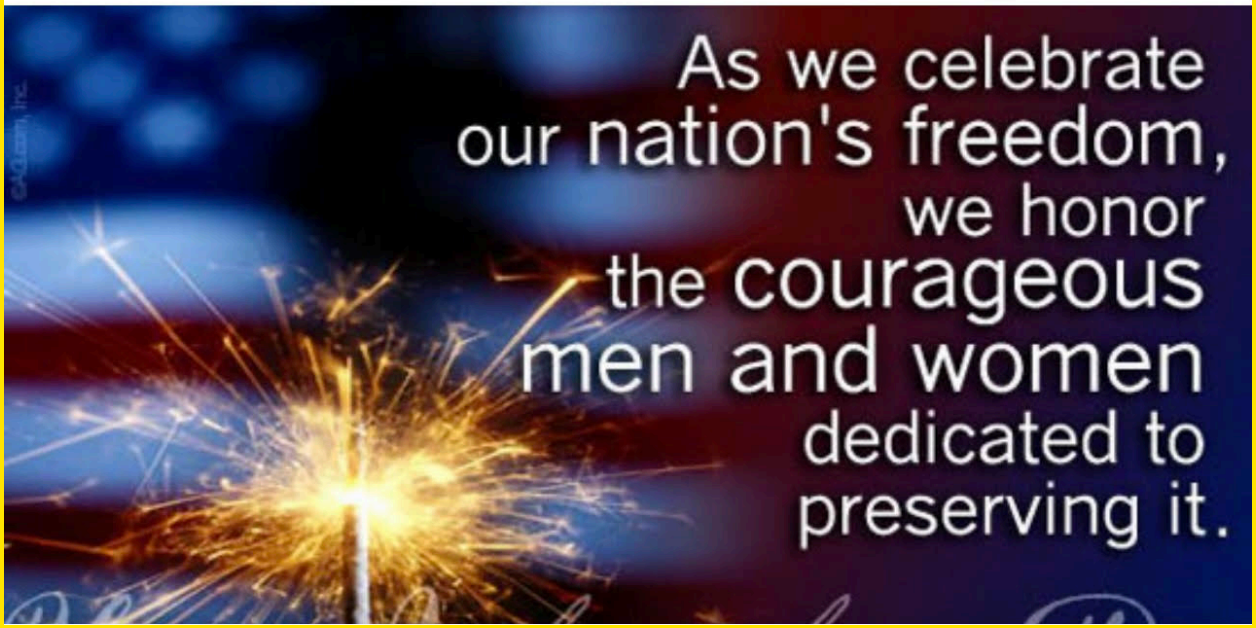
The Directorate of Human Resources and the Retiree Council will conduct a retiree appreciation event on **Oct. 25** for all retired soldiers and spouses from all military service branches in the National Capital Region. This event is a testament to our value and respect for our retired soldiers and their spouses.

As in past retiree events, various services and activities will cater to our retired soldiers and their spouses' needs and interests. These include information booths with subject matter experts on Delta Dental, TRICARE, AARP, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and more. There will also be a health fair that includes flu shots and other clinics. Breakfast, refreshments, a bagged lunch, and cake will be available.

Reconnect with familiar faces and create new friendships. For further information, call Gwendolyn Lott at 703-806-4551 or email her at Gwendolyn.s.lott.civ@army.mil.

Editor's note: *There is exciting news about the Fort Belvoir Post Exchange.* ***Did you know it has a Home Depot?*** *Exchange shoppers can purchase major appliances from The Home Depot tax-free and schedule best-in-class delivery and installation through the Exchange partnership. Home Depot fulfills orders and handles customer service for deliveries and installations. Adding this partner enhances the quality of life for soldiers and Exchange shoppers.*

HONOR THE BRAVE
NAVY
Montebello Military Members,
Veterans, Families, & Supporters
REMEMBER
MEMORIAL
Day
Memorial Day
Remember
& HONOR


As we celebrate
our nation's freedom,
we honor
the courageous
men and women
dedicated to
preserving it.

Making All My Birthdays Romantic and Extraordinary

Peter knew that I treasured my birthday more than any other celebratory occasion. Accordingly, he made every one of my birthdays an extraordinarily romantic and special event.

Knowing my love of roses, Peter, each birthday, would augment the dozen roses which he so romantically gave me each week into a magnificent arrangement of three dozen red roses.

To celebrate our shared love of exercise, Peter bought me a Lifetime Membership to Gold's Gym to match his own Lifetime Membership; we fully used our memberships to exercise together every Weekend and Holiday.

Next, Peter fulfilled my birthday wish for a Concept II Ergometer rowing machine, so that we could row together.

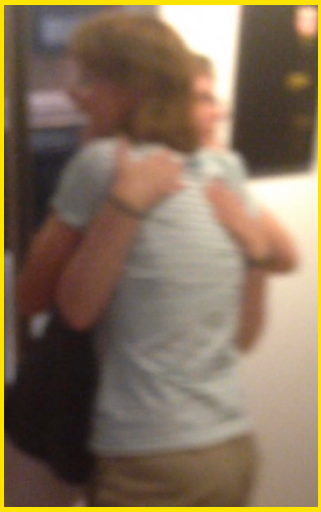
That gift let me even more fully understand Peter's passion for rowing, as every morning I would enthusiastically jump out of bed at 5am so I could row for 30 minutes before heading to work.

And as our relationship became more romantic, so did Peter's birthday gifts to me. Being aware of my fondness for earrings, Peter would surprise me each birthday with a gorgeous set of new earrings, in the styles I love, with different precious gems each birthday, including diamonds, emeralds with diamonds, rubies, blue topaz, and pink tourmaline. Then came the stunning Australian Opal and Lapiz Signet rings. The Lapiz Signet ring was a particularly touching gift, because when I was little girl I couldn't say the word "present" and instead I called each present a "Piah". Peter knew that background, and had the inside of my Lapiz Signet ring inscribed with the very touching words: "My Love, Life, & Piah".

Even more touching to my heart than the beautiful jewelry were the beautiful memories which Peter created for me, with the people whom I love most. Peter knew that I love surprises, so he arranged a surprise birthday party with all the people in our dance class singing "Happy Birthday" to me as Peter crowned me with a "Birthday Girl" tiara and wrapped me in a "Birthday Girl" sash. Peter captured my moment of great joy and laughter that day in this photograph:

Peter had that photograph enlarged to life-size, had it mounted on canvas, and hung that framed canvas on the wall.

For my next birthday, Peter managed to sneak all my favorite work colleagues from District Of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) into his condominium to sing “Happy Birthday” to me and hug me as I opened the door.



The most amazing birthday surprise Peter pulled off started when he picked me up at my door, had me close my eyes as he gently led me out to the parking lot, and then had me open my eyes to see a beautiful long, black, stretch, moon-roof limousine with uniformed chauffeur standing before me. I was stunned by this extraordinary surprise. But then Peter opened the limousine door to reveal the even-more-extraordinary birthday surprise inside my extraordinary birthday surprise. There inside the stretch limousine was my entire family, singing "Happy Birthday" to me and blowing birthday horns and tossing birthday confetti. Peter had arranged for my entire family to be flown in from all over the East Coast: my Sister and Brother-In-Law and Niece from Chicago, my Nephew from New York City, and my Brother and Sister-In-Law from Philadelphia. By this time, tears of joy were streaming down my face at seeing my beloved family, who were also joyfully tearful at this glorious reunion. Peter had arranged for the limousine driver to drive us first to my favorite drive-through - Wendy's - so we could enjoy the startled gasps on the faces of Wendy's staff and patrons as our super-stretch limousine glided through the Wendy's drive-through window, and then drive us to my favorite place in the entire DMV area - the Washington Zoo, for me to enjoy an extended visit with the animals I love so much - and finally to an exquisite Indian restaurant for dinner. Peter captured the entire experience in video and photos so that we could all share those memories forever.

Here we are laughing and talking and sipping champagne inside the stretch limousine, and arriving at the iconic entrance to the Washington Zoo.

Inside the Zoo, Peter felt it was great fun to find a monk who was wearing a robe a similar color as my top - and convinced him to take a picture with me. I one-upped the monk with my Birthday Girl Tiara.

Peter helped tame the Giant Metal Anteater.

Peter then saved me from the ravenous jaws of the Ferocious Inanimate Dinosaur.

And we completed my birthday celebration with scrumptious Indian cuisine.

What a perfect day with my beloved family and The Love Of My Life!

The Beautiful Collage
Of Our Memories

I was very touched when Peter collected photographs of our most precious memories, and had them professionally framed into a gigantic wall-sized collage - centered around our pet-name Bear theme and our shared activities. Peter had that collage mounted on its own separate wall - which Peter then named "Our Wall Of Shared Memories" - so that every day as we pass by that wall, we can vicariously relive all the treasured moments we have shared together. Peter said it was reminiscent of his father's evoking the beautiful memories of his courtship of Peter's mother, of which I wrote in the earlier section of this book entitled "The Courtship And Marriage Of Peter's Parents" (i.e., "Allan would always address Dorothy as "Missy" as a way of daily harkening back to the romance of their Chefoo courtship").

Peter Blackledge:
Renaissance Man

It's very difficult to be recognized in a condominium community of more than one thousand residents. But Peter had done so much, and given so freely of his time and his money for our Montebello Condominium community, that it would have been difficult not to notice and thankfully admire. Peter's active participation in the multiple Montebello Committees, plus his creatively envisioning, establishing, and leading Montebello's first and only indoor and outdoor free dance classes, plus Montebello's first and only "Montebello Walkers", plus Montebello's first and only "Montebello Walking Docents", plus Montebello's first and only Military Veterans recognition and support organization "Montebello Military Members, Veterans, Families, and Supporters (MMMVFS) Group" was so unique that the President of Montebello's Board Of Directors sent Peter a personal email complimenting Peter on creating so many enduring activities for Montebello residents. And the Montebello newspaper "The Times Of Montebello" published the attached full-page tribute to Peter, which they titled "Peter Blackledge: Renaissance Man." Most impressively, that article recounted when Peter led a Montebello team to successfully fight building contractors who threatened to take actions which would lower Montebello's property values and ruin Montebello's beautiful back gate views. Peter marshaled local communities, political leaders and historians in permanently terminating that building contractors plans. As the attached Montebello article documented:

Our Neighbors

Peter Blackledge: Renaissance Man

by Sue Allen, *Times* staff

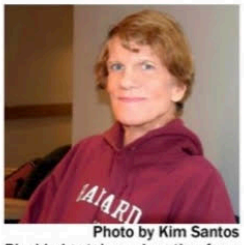


Photo by Kim Santos
Blackledge takes a breather from the disco party he hosted on Oct. 5.

From U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) graduate to dance teacher to champion athlete, Peter Blackledge has led a remarkable life. This 36-year owner/resident of Montebello is now sharing his passions with his neighbors.

In mid-2019, "Tall Tex," as he is affectionately known by Montebello security staff, gave two dance parties for his neighbors. "I wanted to give back to my community," he explained, "by sharing my time, financial resources, and dance expertise. The main objective is to bring residents happiness, health, and community connectedness." Tillie Cassidy, chair of Montebello Activities Committee (MAC), noticed the success of his parties and offered "to do this on a grander scale." That led to MAC supporting Blackledge's next dance party and to "Sunday Afternoon Fever" dance lessons taught by Blackledge and his lifelong partner, Laura Foy, as well as plans for regular dance parties four times a year.

Blackledge took up dancing when he moved to Alexandria in 1977. "I was captivated by the popular, pervasive dance scene. I immersed myself in disco/hustle, then salsa, and finally bachata, progressing from student to instructor in each." In honor of National Hispanic Heritage Month, Blackledge integrated the two Latin nightclub disco dances, salsa and bachata, into his lessons and parties.

Dancing is just one way Blackledge volunteers. Through his church, he has counseled women on health issues and worked with mentally and physically challenged children and adults. He was recognized by the District of Columbia for his work with the Washington, D.C., Special Olympics.

Blackledge followed in the footsteps of his father and brother when he graduated from U.S. Naval Academy with a B.S. in Nuclear Engineering/Applied Science. A highlight of his Naval career came in 1973. "I was Command Duty Officer of the cruiser USS Albany," he said. "We had just returned from a six-month Mediterranean deployment, and all the senior officers had gone ashore. My shipmate, David Eisenhower, knocked on my stateroom door. David apologetically, but with a wry smile, informed me his father-in-law, then-president Richard Nixon, would be coming aboard for a surprise visit. Just another typical Navy day in the fleet, to have the President and Commander-In-Chief standing at the foot of my bow, asking for permission to come aboard."

At National Defense University, Blackledge earned his M.S. in 2000 as Distinguished Graduate, and headed a U.S.-led delegation of senior multi-national military and civilian executives on a round-the-world inspection of naval shipyards. He retired from the Navy in 2002 to become Vice President for Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), a Fortune 500 company, retiring from SAIC in 2010.

Blackledge lettered in basketball in high school, and lettered each year at USNA in varsity heavyweight rowing, becoming an Intercollegiate Rowing Association National Champion. In 1989 he won five medals in international rowing competition under Olympic Gold Medal coach Alan Rosenberg. He added 32 trophies in indoor and beach volleyball tournaments, and studied martial arts under world champion Chuck Norris.

Blackledge discovered Montebello in 1983. "When I drove into Montebello the first time, it seemed like I was suddenly over the rainbow. Everything I wanted from a house, and with the carefree lifestyle and wonderful neighbors and community of a condominium."

But the community environment he loved was threatened in the mid-1990s when developers briefed Montebello residents on plans to build high-rise condos right up to the back fence. "I stood up and told them, 'This is my home. I can't speak for my neighbors, but I can tell you I will fight your onerous plans with every fiber of my body.' All the Montebello attendees, who had been virtually silent, gave me a standing ovation. The Montebello board president asked me to establish and chair a new Montebello Area Development Committee. We fought the developers, and today have a beautiful park and view to enjoy." In appreciation, the MCUOA awarded certificates to Blackledge in 1997 and 1998.

Recently, Blackledge invited all residents to join him as USNA christened and launched its newest Navy crew racing shell, the "Peter Blackledge, '69." The Mayor of Annapolis and a distinguished panel of Navy admirals presided over the event. In Blackledge's words: "This was an opportunity to honor my neighbors, classmates, teammates, family, friends, and, particularly, my beloved father."

TRANSITIONS

Condolences to

The family and friends of **Joe Tilko,** Building 4, who passed away on June 21 at age 91. Joe and his wife, Pat, (who passed in 2015) moved to Montebello in 2000. A native of West Virginia, he worked for the Hecht Company and the Small Business Administration. Joe played golf at the Tantallon Country Club, and here at Montebello he enjoyed talking to neighbors at the bench behind Building 4 and riding around in his red scooter. A WWII Army veteran, he will be buried in Arlington National Cemetery at a later date.

Editor's note: The photo is courtesy of the family.

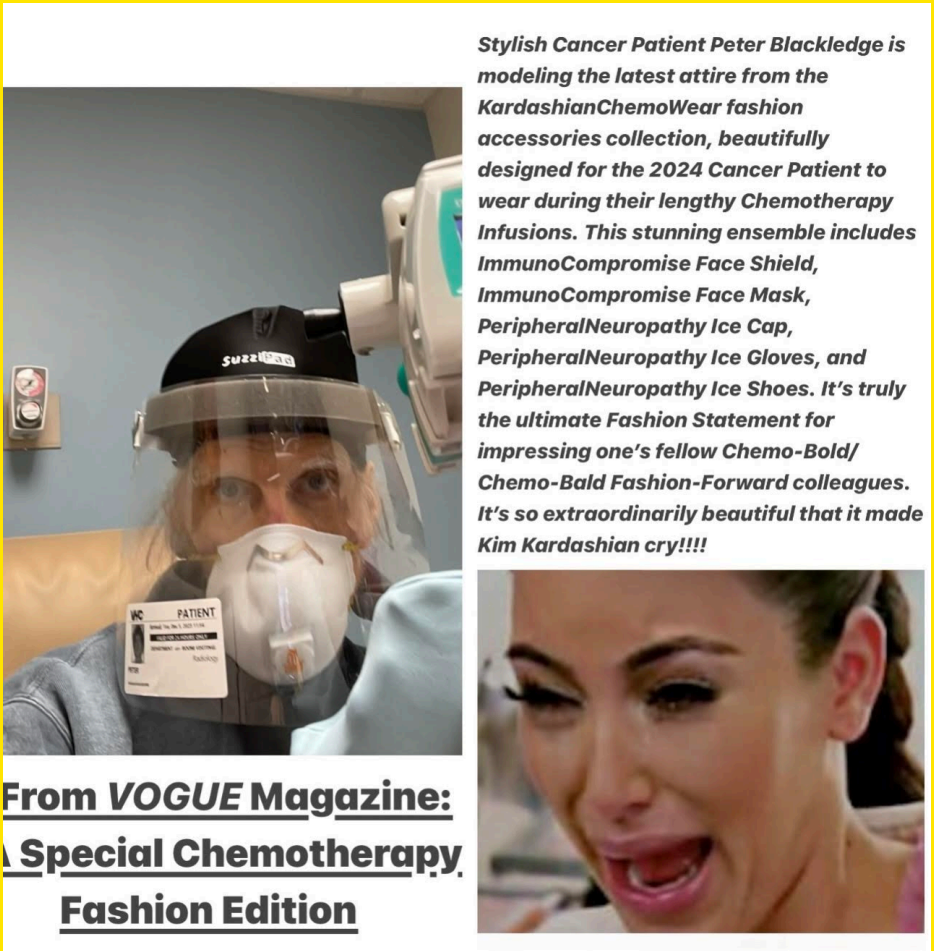
“But the community environment he loved was threatened in the mid-1990s when developers briefed Montebello residents on plans to build high-rise condos right up to the back fence. "I stood up and told them, This is my home. I can't speak for my neighbors, but I can tell you I will fight your onerous plans with every fiber of my being.” All the Montebello attendees, who had been virtually silent gave me a standing ovation. The Montebello Board President asked me to establish and chair a new Montebello Area Development Committee. We successfully fought the developers, and today have a beautiful park and view to enjoy." In appreciation, the MCUOA awarded certificates to Blackledge in 1997 and 1998.”

Additionally, for the forty-two years of his residency in Montebello, Peter has - in addition to contributing each year to the Montebello Employee’s Christmas Fund - freely given an additional $50.00 to each member of the Montebello staff in appreciation for the outstanding work they do.

The more I learn about Peter’s stunning accomplishments and generosity in so many areas, the more awestruck and enamored I become.

Laughing Through Cancer's Intense Pain and Crushing Fatigue

Peter's Strength Of Spirit is incredible. He had admitted to me that his Chemotherapy - which we found out was twice the usual amount due to the unusual severity of Peter's Cancer - was the most intense and debilitating pain he had ever experienced. As Peter explained it, pain is most often localized and treatable, but Chemotherapy invades every cell of the body - and every single cell is screaming out in intense pain. There is no pain relief, and no relief in sight. But Peter didn't want to worry his family and friends, so he adopted a stoic approach, drawing on his experience as a United States Naval Academy Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman. Peter vividly recalled the intense pain and fatigue which he had successfully endured in every 2000-meter race, which is necessary for each Oarsman to overcome in order to win. He remembered feeling at 500 meters that the intense pain and crushing fatigue already seemed to be unbearable, but it would become much more severe at 1000 meters and 1500 meters and particularly through the final sprint to 2000 meters. Competitive Oarsmen learn to ignore that intense pain and crushing fatigue, and Peter applied that training to his Cancer, Chemotherapy, First Generation Androgen Deprivation Therapy, and Second-Generation Androgen Deprivation Therapy. And somehow, Peter was even able to maintain his wonderful and beautifully quirky sense of humor. One sweet example was this parody which he produced regarding his Chemotherapy:


PATIENT
From VOGUE Magazine:
Special Chemotherapy
Fashion Edition
Stylish Cancer Patient Peter Blackledge is modeling the latest attire from the KardashianChemoWear fashion accessories collection, beautifully designed for the 2024 Cancer Patient to wear during their lengthy Chemotherapy Infusions. This stunning ensemble includes ImmunoCompromise Face Shield, ImmunoCompromise Face Mask, PeripheralNeuropathy Ice Cap, PeripheralNeuropathy Ice Gloves, and PeripheralNeuropathy Ice Shoes. It's truly the ultimate Fashion Statement for impressing one's fellow Chemo-Bold/ Chemo-Bald Fashion-Forward colleagues. It's so extraordinarily beautiful that it made Kim Kardashian cry!!!!

Conclusion

Peter, I Am So Very Proud Of You

Peter, I am so proud of you for such an extraordinary Life Well Lived. I feel privileged and honored to have shared our decades with you as your Life Partner.

Farewell

Farewell My Beloved Peter

Farewell, My Beloved Peter, Love Of My Life. Thank you for giving me the happiest years of my life. I will deeply miss you every moment of every day, sustained only by faith of our future reunion.

Having honorably served your Community, your Nation, and your God, you are now resting in the arms of your Creator……

And, as illustrated in this video, *Dancing In The Sky*.

Join us on the exciting life journey of Peter Douglas Blackledge, as he experiences a series of adventures which would make Forest Gump jealous. Peter grew up in an extraordinary Navy family: Peter's father was born in 1896, a year before Amelia Earhart's birth. He graduated from the United States Naval Academy (USNA) in 1919 to fly a bi-plane in Navy's fledgling flight program, almost a decade before Earhart's celebrated flight, and in World War II he was the Commanding Officer of the cruiser USS BILOXI (CL-80) during its historic evacuation of POWs from Japan at war's end. Peter's mother was born in 1907, 13 years before women had the right to vote; but she worked directly for Secretary of State Kellogg, was selected to be part of U.S. President Calvin Coolidge's historic trip to Cuba aboard battleship Texas, and served on the historic commission of the League Of Nations in Peiping, China investigating Japanese and Chinese differences in Shanghai and Manchuria. Peter's sister, Penny, was elected by Rice University to be their 1958 Homecoming Queen and Cotton Bowl Queen for the historic game between USNA and Rice, and her twin sister, Patti, was requested by USNA to be their Queen for that 1958 Cotton Bowl game - the only time in history that USNA had a football bowl Queen, and the only time in history that twin sisters were Queens for opposing teams in a football bowl game; both sisters were then featured on "The Ed Sullivan Show". Peter's brother, Michael, was in USNA Class of 1963, graduating fifth overall and first in math.

Peter's amalgam of adventures is stunning: Being personally selected by U.S. President Lyndon Johnson for nomination to USNA; being personally saluted by U.S. President Richard Nixon; becoming a USNA Varsity Heavyweight Oarsman, and a National Champion; training under World Karate Champion Chuck Norris; being recruited by Olympic Gold Medalist and Hall of Fame Rowing Coach Allen Rosenberg to row in International Masters Competition, in which Peter won Gold and Silver medals in each race; being cited by *Volleyball Magazine*; being honored by USNA in their production of a special video of Peter's life; being further honored by USNA in their dedication of the "PETER BLACKLEDGE, '69" Navy Crew Racing Shell in a special ceremony at the USNA's historic Hubbard Hall, with over 150 U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Flag Officers, U.S. Government Senior Executives, and USNA's Olympic and Champion oarsmen in attendance; becoming the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's first Director for Naval Warfare and first Director for Aircraft Carriers and Amphibious Ships; meeting one-on-one with legendary Admiral Arleigh Burke to discuss his role as Chief of Naval Operations during the ill-fated "Bay Of Pigs" invasion of Cuba; meeting one-on-one with notorious Congressman Charlie Wilson (the subject of the award-winning movie "Charlie Wilson's War") for Peter to advise Congressman Wilson on potential Navy weapon systems to arm Afghan Freedom Fighters; and being recruited to be Vice President of the Fortune 500 company Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC).

But there were also experiences of profound sadness, such as Peter's personally experiencing the stark dichotomy brought about by the Vietnam War: In 1967, only three years after Peter received a standing ovation from his entire 1,000-person high school for his being personally nominated by U.S. President Lyndon Johnson to attend USNA, Peter was spat upon, cursed, and called "Baby Killer" for serving his country. And despite Peter's lifelong dedication to good health, in 2023 being struck with terminal Stage Four Advanced Metastatic Prostate Cancer, Lymph Node Cancer, and Bone Cancer. Due to Peter's strong faith, determination, and the Power of Prayer, Peter has not only survived but is currently thriving. Peter's life is the full panoply of experience and emotion, and I hope you will join with me in this fascinating journey.

National Security Author *Laura Helen Foy*

National Security Notification: Portions of this book address Classified information and events, and have been reviewed, vetted, and approved with redaction by the Prepublication Classification Review Board (PCRB) of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).